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**THE PENANCE OF JOHN LOGAN,
AND TWO OTHER TALES.**

THE PENANCE OF JOHN LOGAN,

5-6-11

AND TWO OTHER TALES.

BY

WILLIAM BLACK,

AUTHOR OF "THE STRANGE ADVENTURES OF A HOUSE-BOAT," ETC.

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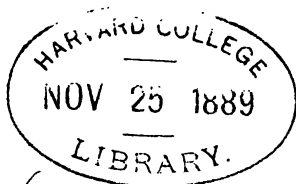
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THE PENANCE OF JOHN LOGAN.

CHAPTER I.

THE TEMPTATION.

THE summer sea was shining fair and calm, a perfect mirror of the almost cloudless heavens overhead, as a small rowing-boat, occupied by a single person, was slowly approaching a lonely little island in the Outer Hebrides. The solitary rower was neither fisherman nor sailor, but merely a holiday-maker—a well-known banker from London, in fact—who was seeking rest and recreation in the West Highlands, and who had rather a fancy for going about all by himself and for exploring out-of-the-way neighbourhoods. He had heard a good deal of this *Eilean-na-Keal*—the Island of the Burying-place—of its sculptured tombstones, its ancient chapel, its Saints' Well, and other relics and

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traces of the time when the early Christians made their first settlements in these sea-solitudes; and on this pleasant morning, the water being like a sheet of glass, he thought he could not do better than hire a boat at the little village on the mainland where he chanced to be staying, and pull himself across. It is true that the nearer he got to the island, he found that there was a heavy tide running, and his labour at the oars was a much more arduous task than he had bargained for; but eventually he managed to fight his way through, the boat at last shooting into a small and sheltered bay, well out of the current.

But when he stood up to reconnoitre the shore and select a landing-place, he found to his intense astonishment that the island was not so totally uninhabited as he had been informed it was. A pair of eyes were calmly regarding him; and those eyes belonged to a little old man who was seated on a rock some way along the beach—a little, bent, broad-shouldered old man, with long white hair and tanned and weather-worn face. A further glance showed him a cumbrous and dilapidated rowing-boat hauled up into a kind of creek, and also a number of lobster-traps lying about

on the shingle. The new-comer therefore naturally concluded that he had not been forestalled by any such hateful being as a fellow-tourist, but merely by an old lobster-fisherman who had come out to look after his traps.

The Englishman shoved his boat through the seaweed, jumped out, and hauled it up on the beach; and then walked along to the little old man, who had ceased mending his lobster-traps, and was still calmly regarding the stranger.

“Good morning!” the latter said, cheerfully—he was a good-humoured-looking, middle-aged person, who had knocked about the world sufficiently, and who liked to converse with whomsoever he chanced to meet. “This is rather a lonely place for you to be in, isn’t it?”

“Ay,” said the old man, as he carefully scrutinised the other from head to heel, “there’s not many comes here.”

“But there used to be people living on the island?” Mr. Ramsden continued, chiefly for the sake of getting his new acquaintance to talk.

The old man paused for a moment or two; then he slowly made answer—

“Ay, I have heard that.”

Was he half-witted, then, or was his English defective, or was it his lonely life that had made him thus chary and hesitating of speech? He seemed to ponder over the questions, his eyes all the while taking note of every detail of the stranger's features and dress.

"I saw some seals as I came along: are there many of them about here?"

"Ay, plenty."

"Don't people come and shoot them?"

"No."

"Doesn't anybody ever come here?"

"No."

"Do you ever have to pass the night here?"

"Ay."

"Where do you sleep, then—in your boat?"

He shook his head.

"Where then?"

"In the chaypel."

"Oh, that's the chapel I've heard about: you must come and show me where it is, if you are not too busy. Have you been getting many lobsters lately?"

"Some."

"What do you do with them? You can't have many customers in Harivaig."

"To London," the old man said, laconically.

"Oh, you send them to London? To a fishmonger, or a fish-dealer, perhaps?"

"Ay, do ye know him?" And then old John Logan seemed to wake up a little; indeed, he spoke almost eagerly, though he was continually hesitating for want of the proper word. "Do ye know him?—Corstorphine—Billingsgate—he sends me the boxes. Do ye know him?—bekass—bekass he is not giffing me enough—and if there wass another one now I would go aweh from him. Mebbe you know Corstorphine?"

"No; I'm sorry to say I don't. I should be very glad to help you if I could, but I'm afraid you would run a great risk in giving up a constant customer. I suppose he takes whatever you send?"

"Oh, ay; oh, ay," was the old man's answer, "but he does not gif enough! And—and I hef a young lass at home—she is the daughter of my daughter that's dead—and—and she is going to be married; and the young man—he is for buying a—a part in a herring-smack, and I am for helping him with the money. But Corstorphine should gif more."

"Well, I think so too. So your granddaughter is going to be married; and you are

going to help the young man to buy his share in the herring-smack as a kind of marriage-portion : is that it ? ”

“ Ay, it’s something like that,” said old Logan—but doubtfully, for perhaps he had not quite understood.

“ I should have thought now,” Mr. Ramsden resumed—he had a knack of interesting himself in people—“ that it would have been worth your while to take the young man into your own business, instead of buying him a share in a smack. You are getting up in years ; and this is a very lonely life for you to lead ; if the young man came in—with a little capital, perhaps ”——

Old Logan shook his head.

“ It’s not a good business at ahl. There’s the coorse weather ; and the things brekkin’ ; and—and then there’s Corstorphine. He is not a fair man, Corstorphine. He should gif more—pless me, they hef plenty of money in London, as I wass being told many’s the time.”

“ Yes, but they like to keep it, my friend,” the banker replied. “ Well, now, if you are not too busy, will you come and show me where the tombstones are, and the other things I have heard about ? ”

The old man slowly rose, and put aside the trap he had been mending. It was now apparent that, despite his short stature, his white hair, and his glazed eyes, he was a much stronger man—especially about the chest and shoulders—than he had appeared to be when sitting in a crouching position: there was no longer any mystery as to how that big, cumbrous boat had been got over.

“Mebbe you’ll not be living in London?” the lobster fisherman asked thoughtfully, as he led the way for his companion along some rising slopes that were thickly matted with bracken.

“Yes, I live in London,” was the answer.

“But you are not knowing Corstorphine?” was the next question.

“No, I don’t know him; but surely you would not quarrel with him before getting another customer?”

“He is not a fair man; he should be giffing me more”—this was the refrain of the conversation, repeated again and again, as they made their way up to a rude little enclosure, the four-square wall of which had tumbled down until it was nearly level with the grass and the abundant nettles.

And now the banker-traveller found what he

had come in search of—all kinds of sculptured gravestones, with memorial figures of knights in armour, lying scattered about among the tall weeds. In most cases he had to clear away this herbage before he could get a proper view of the stones; while his companion stood blankly gazing on, perhaps wondering at this curiosity about such familiar things, but saying nothing. Nor did the stranger apparently expect to get from the old fisherman much information about the Culdees and their haunts, and the Irish princes and knights who were fain to choose for their burial-place one of those sacred islands in the northern seas. He examined tombstone after tombstone, observing the curious emblems—elephants, two-handed swords, rude castles, and such smaller things as pincers and combs—that no doubt would have afforded to anyone sufficiently instructed some hint as to the dignity or office of the now-forgotten dead; and very singular it was to find these memorials of bygone ages in this silent little island set amid these lonely seas. Then they went to the chapel, a small building of hardly any architectural pretensions beyond some sculptured stones over the doorway; while inside the only noticeable feature was a lot of scattered hay—

the old fisherman's bed when his business or the weather compelled him to pass a night on the island. Finally, they visited the Saints' Well, a considerable hole bored down through the solid rock; and here the exploration of this isolated little bit of no-man's-territory seemed to have come to an end.

But their last quest had brought them to the top of a ridge, from which they could look down on a tiny bay—a secluded small bay that appeared to be safe from the strong tides that were seen to be running a little way further out.

“Not much of a current in here, is there?” the Englishman asked.

“No, not mich,” his companion answered.

“Well, look here, my friend, before setting out for home again, I think I should like to have a dip in the sea, and this seems a very nice and likely place. In the meantime, if you go back to your boat, I wish you would pick me out two or three lobsters, and you shall have your own price for them—better than what Corstorphine gives you, I imagine. Do you understand?”

“Oh, ay,” said the old man, beginning to move away; “I’ll have their claws tied by the time you come.”

These were the last words that this hapless traveller was ever to hear on this earth. The old fisherman went slowly back to his boat, to select the lobsters for his unexpected customer. He went leisurely about the task, thinking of nothing, most likely, but the price that would probably be paid for them. Then he lit his pipe, and sat waiting in the silence. An absolute silence it was, save for the noise of certain sea-swallows, that seemed to have been disturbed by the bather, and were now wheeling and darting overhead, uttering screams of alarm and resentment over the intrusion.

Suddenly the old man heard a cry—a call for help, as it seemed to be, from far away. He started up erect, and listened. That faint, boding sound was repeated. Instantly he threw aside the lobster-trap that happened to be in his hand, and, with a speed that could hardly have been expected from one of his age, he made his way up the slopes of bracken, until he stood on a knoll commanding a view of the bay beside which he had left the stranger. The same moment he perceived whence had come that cry of anguish. The swimmer was some way out—perhaps the strong tide had caught him—perhaps cramp had struck him helpless—

but just as old John Logan, entirely bewildered and unnerved, was hesitating as to what he ought to do, there was an arm raised from the surface of the water—as if in a last, pitiful appeal to the silent heavens overhead—and then the smooth plain of the sea was blank of any feature whatsoever. Nothing but this wide waste—and the voiceless air—and the warm sun shining abroad over an empty world.

Hardly knowing what he did, the old man rushed down the slopes again, and across the beach, and shoved off the stranger's boat, which was lighter than his own, jumping into it, and setting to work at the oars with a breathless and strenuous haste. But there were two small promontories intervening between this bay and that on the western side of the island; and his hurried pulling was not likely to be of any avail. Old Logan did his best—probably too much alarmed to have any time for the calculation of chances; and ever, as he came within view of the stretch of water where he had seen the drowning man go down, he kept glancing over his shoulder as he tugged away at the oars. There was nothing visible at all—nothing but that wide blue plain of sea, and the lonely shore stretching in successive indentations away

to the south. He relaxed his efforts now. He had reached, as well as he could judge, the very spot at which he had seen the stranger disappear. There was no sign of him, nor of any other living thing—even the screaming sea-fowl had departed. He took the oars into the boat, and stood up—looking all around. It was hopeless. If the swimmer had been seized with cramp, as seemed most likely, this strong tide would have swept him away with it long before Logan had come round the point. Indeed, the current was so powerful that the old man had presently to take to the oars again, and pull hard into the quieter waters of the bay, where eventually he landed, dragging the boat a little bit up on the beach.

He was used to loneliness; but this loneliness had never been terrible to him before. That boding cry—that piteous call for aid—seemed still to linger in the air. It was so short a time since he had been familiarly speaking to this fellow-creature, who had been suddenly swept away out of the living and breathing world. In vain the old man, with long-accustomed eyes, swept that vast expanse of water; there was no sign—he knew there could be no sign. It was only a kind of mysterious fascination that kept

him gazing on the wide watery plain where he had seen that arm thrown up as in a last despairing appeal for help. Help, he knew, there was none now; the stranger who had sought these solitary shores had vanished for ever from human ken.

There was nothing now for him but to go away back to the village of Harivaig, on the mainland, to acquaint the people there with what had happened; and so, with a parting glance at the empty waste of sea, he set out along the beach. And here, after he had gone some thirty or forty yards, he came upon the drowned man's clothes. He approached them with a morbid curiosity, and yet with a certain reluctance that was akin to fear. They looked strangely like a corpse. They were dead and mute, an unfamiliar and uncanny thing, lying dark on the white beach. And then, as he drew nearer—slowly and cautiously—he noticed that there was some small object there that glittered in the strong sunlight. It was a piece of jewellery, lying on the empty waistcoat. He went close up, his eyes still fixed on those small stones that gleamed in the sun, and, although he did not quite know what this thing was—it was a locket, indeed, of considerable size, with

initials on the outside composed of alternate rubies and diamonds—he recognised it as one of those adornments that rich people wore. And then—at what instigation, who can tell?—he bethought him of his granddaughter, Jeannie, the one sole creature in the world he cared for; she was to be married in the autumn, and she had nothing of this kind to give her value in the eyes of her husband. The young man who was going to marry her had made several voyages to foreign parts, and could talk bravely about the wonderful things he had seen: moreover, he was a smart young fellow and had saved up a little money; the neighbours seemed to consider that the granddaughter of the poor old lobster-fisherman was making a very good match. But if Jeannie were to wear this pretty thing on her wedding-day, would not the young man prize her the more? For good looks there was none to beat her on mainland or island, and that everyone was ready to say; but her grandfather's hard-earned savings would be drawn upon rather to give the young couple a fair start in life; she would not have fine clothes to wear as a bride. But if she were to appear with this pretty thing at her neck, would not the young man be all the better pleased with

her; and Jeannie would be proud to know that he thought something of her; and none of the neighbours would any longer be fancying that as regards the marriage between the two young people she was getting the best of the bargain?

Old John Logan turned slowly round—as if he feared to find someone watching him from afar. But his quick, furtive glance found nothing. The world was empty of all token of life. There were the trending lines of the bay, the placid mirror of the sea, the cloudless heavens; and he was alone with them. And he was alone with this pretty thing that would make his granddaughter of greater importance in the eyes of her husband. Of what use was it now to the drowned man? Doubtless there were other things of value in these clothes if he were to search—money, a gold watch, and so forth; but he would not touch any of these; for himself he wanted nothing; it was for Jeannie that he coveted this bit of adornment. He could hide it away somewhere. The drowning of the unfortunate man would soon be forgotten. And then the autumn would come; and as the wedding-day drew near he would present Jeannie with this pretty toy;

and who could tell that he had not sent to Glasgow for it?

He turned round again towards the bauble that had tempted him, and stood there helpless and motionless for several seconds. Then he knelt down upon the shingle with both knees. But as he took up the locket—with a kind of pretence of only examining it—his hands were shaking as if he had been stricken with palsy. He pushed his scrutiny further. By accident—for he knew nothing of such trinkets—he happened to touch the yielding portion of the gold loop attaching the locket to the watch-chain; he pressed it, and saw how he could take the locket out. The next moment the prize that he had feared almost to look upon lay in the palm of his hand. Then he slowly rose—his knees all shaking beneath him—and furtively his glance searched sea and shore for any sign of any living thing. Then, with many a backward look—for it seemed to him that there must be someone behind him, someone unseen, but watching—he crossed over the grassy ridges and went down to the creek in which his boat lay. His hand was shut now, with a nervous and tremulous grasp.

In the boat there was some old canvas that

he sometimes used in patching up the lobster-traps; he cut off a piece, and wrapped up in it that fatal locket, with its glittering jewels; then he made his way up the hill and across to the old chapel. There was no difficulty in finding a hole in which to secrete his treasure; he chose one in the wall, close down to the ground; and then, having deposited the tiny packet there, he went and got some stones and dry earth and closed up the orifice in a rude sort of fashion. But there was little light in this small building; no one could have noticed that the wall had been meddled with.

And then old John Logan went down to the seaside again, and launched his boat. He might have taken the stranger's boat, which was a good deal lighter to pull; but he had left it on the shore of the other bay, and he dreaded to look again on the clothes lying there. So in his own cumbrous craft he set out for the mainland; and in due course of time he reached the small hamlet of Harivaig, which was speedily startled by the news that the Englishman who had recently come thither had been drowned, and that his clothes, and the boat in which he had rowed himself across, would be found on the beach at Eilean-na-Keal.

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CHAPTER II.

REMORSE.

Now, the chief public functionary of Harivaig and its neighbourhood was the parish schoolmaster; and he it was who immediately took steps to apprise the relatives of the drowned man of what had happened. There was no difficulty about discovering who he was. His private address could not be found; but his papers showed clearly enough that he was a partner in the banking firm of Ramsden, Holt, and Smith, of London; and it was to them that the schoolmaster addressed his communication. Then the clothes of the stranger were brought back from the island, and also the boat in which he had rowed himself across. Finally, the owner of the nearest salmon-fishery sent four of his men as a search-party all along the coast; but although they laboured at their task industriously for the better part of two days, no trace of the missing man could be found. Indeed, they worked without hope: it was a matter almost of certainty that the body had been washed out to sea.

Meanwhile, old John Logan had more than once, and all by himself, been over to Eilean-na-Keal, and each time he had stealthily made his way to the small ruined chapel, and taken forth the locket from its secret repository, and regarded its gleaming white and red stones. Moreover, he had accidentally discovered that it would open; and inside he found the portrait of a pale-faced, delicate-featured lady, apparently of middle age. On making this discovery, he had hurriedly shut the trinket again—for the pale face seemed to be looking strangely at him; and he had formed some dark resolution of removing it, either by gentle means or force, before the time came for presenting this pretty, bejewelled wedding-gift to his granddaughter. But even when he restricted his contemplation to the outside—to the rich soft golden surface, and the glittering diamonds and rubies—there was not much joy in his heart. For one thing, a nameless terror seemed to seize him the moment he set foot on the island. He felt haunted by some mysterious presence; however his anxious scrutiny might satisfy him that these indented shores were devoid of human life, he appeared to be always expecting someone; when he walked across the lonely little

knolls, on his way to the chapel, it was as if there were some living creature following him, close to his shoulder, unseen but felt. And in the dusk of the chapel itself, when he was crouching down, ready to thrust back the locket into the hole in the wall, he would listen intently, as if fearing some footstep without; and then again, when he came forth into the daylight, his dazed eyes would furtively and swiftly look all around, to make sure that he was quite alone. If the time would but pass more quickly! If the days and weeks could be annihilated, and his granddaughter's wedding-morn be reached—then this precious thing would pass into her keeping, and would trouble his rest no more. For old John Logan had got into a perturbed and feverish state; the drowning of the stranger had made a great commotion in this quiet neighbourhood; and Logan, as the last person who had seen him, had to answer innumerable questions—that sometimes seemed to bewilder and frighten him by their unexpectedness.

One morning the old man's granddaughter Jeannie was seated on the rude bench outside the cottage. She had got early finished with her household work, and now she was hemming

some handkerchiefs—most likely part of her home-made trousseau—while she sung to herself the cheerful air of “I’ll gang nae mair to yon town” without particular regard to the words. She was a good-looking lass of the darker Celtic type—coal-black hair, a complexion as fresh and clear as a June wild rose, dark blue-grey eyes with black lashes, and a pretty and smiling mouth. She was rather neatly dressed, and seemed very well content with herself; indeed, the neighbours were inclined to be indignant among themselves over the fashion in which old John Logan spoiled his pretty granddaughter. Nevertheless, Jeannie Logan (as she was called, though her name was properly Jeannie Carmichael) was a kind of favourite, and that despite the fact of her small house being kept a good deal more trim and tidy than any other in Harivaig.

The old man came out of the cottage, and was going off for the shore, when his granddaughter stopped him.

“Grandfather,” said she (but she spoke in Gaelic), “will you not stay at home to-day? Archie is coming over from Usgary.”

“What should I stay at home for?” was the answer (also in Gaelic). “When two young

people are going to get married they have plenty to talk of by themselves; it does not need the old man of Ross to tell us that."

The young woman's cheeks flushed a little, but she laughed all the same.

"I know," she said, "that everyone thinks we talk of nothing but nonsense. Well, it is not of much consequence what any of them are thinking. But you remember, grandfather, that the valuing of the nets was to be done this week; and Archie was writing to me that he would like to have your opinion."

"My opinion!" the old man said, testily. "What is the use of my opinion? What do I know about herring-nets that I have not seen?"

Their conversation was interrupted. There was a sound of wheels—a most unusual sound in this unfrequented neighbourhood—and presently there came in sight a waggonette and two horses. As the carriage drove past, a clear enough view of the occupants could be obtained; and these were seen to be a young lady of about seventeen or eighteen, fair-complexioned, and in deep mourning, and a tall and elderly gentleman who sat opposite her in the body of the waggonette. The moment they

had gone by, Jeannie Logan turned eagerly to her grandfather.

"Do you know who these are?" she said. "For I know. These must be the friends of the gentleman who was drowned. And they will be wanting to see you, grandfather—I am sure of it; so you must go indoors at once, and put on a white collar, and your black coat."

"But for what will they want to see me?" the old man said, with a quick look of apprehension on his face.

"Well, you brought the news over from Eilean-na-Keal; and you were the last that saw the gentleman, and spoke to him. I should not wonder if that was his daughter—poor young lady, this will be a sad day for her. Grandfather, go away and put on your black coat; for they will be coming to see you, or sending for you."

And she was right. Not a quarter of an hour had elapsed when a messenger came from the inn to say that the daughter of the gentleman who had been drowned was there, and that she wished to see John Logan, if he would be so kind as to come along. In the meantime, the old man had taken his granddaughter's advice—indeed, he allowed himself to be

governed by her in all such matters—and put on his Sunday clothes. As he was setting out with the messenger, Jeannie Logan placed her hand on his arm for a moment, and said in a low voice,

“Grandfather, I think the young lady will be for going over to Eilean-na-Keal. Well, if the people have any sense, they will not allow her, for it will break her heart.”

“Ay, ay!” he said, eagerly. “You are a wise lass, Jeannie; she should not go over to Eilean-na-Keal. No, no; what is the use of her going over to Eilean-na-Keal?”

And this is what he seemed to be pondering over all the way to the inn; for again and again he said in a half-muttering way to his companion.

“Ay, she is a wise lass is Jeannie. She has an old head on young shoulders. Why should the young lady be for going over to Eilean-na-Keal?”

But when at length he reached the inn, and was ushered into the parlour where the strangers were, there was no more speech left in him. This tall, fair-haired girl—whose face was wan and pale, and looked all the paler because of her deep mourning—when she came forward in a

pathetic kind of way to take his hand, startled him beyond measure. Had he not seen her before, or someone strangely like her? And then in a bewildered fashion he thought of the face in the locket—the face that he had feared. This was the daughter, then : that, the mother. And he seemed incapable of meeting the steady glance of those plaintive eyes that regarded him so strangely ; he was breathless, irresolute, nervous ; he intertwined his fingers ; he had no answer for the questions which the elderly gentleman, the young lady's companion, put to him. The landlady, a placid-looking, middle-aged woman, had taken the liberty of remaining in the room.

“He is not used to the English, sir,” she said. “He will tell you when he thinks over it.”

“And will you not sit down?” the young lady said very gently to him ; and she herself pulled out a chair from the wall. For her the violence of grief seemed over and gone ; she was outwardly resigned and calm ; it was only at times that tears swam into her eyes, and she appeared anxious to hide her emotion from these strangers.

“Yes, sit down, and take your own time,”

her companion, who was a Mr. Holt, said to old John Logan. "Just think over it, and tell us at your leisure how Mr. Ramsden came to the island, and what he said to you, and what was the last you saw of him. You can understand that his daughter is very anxious to know."

And then the old man, halting and hesitating at every few words, told his tale. Except for the matter of his English, it ought to have come readily enough to him, for he had narrated it, to the minutest circumstances, again and again among the neighbours. It was noticeable, however, that now he kept his eyes fixed on the ground, and that his narrative was a kind of appeal; he was as a culprit endeavouring to justify himself; and over and over he repeated that no man could have pulled harder than he did to try to reach the drowning swimmer.

"Oh, I am sure of that—I am sure of that!" the girl said, piteously. "And—we will not forget it."

He did not appear to understand what she meant, so anxious was he to exonerate himself.

"There wass the two points to go round," he repeated once more. "When I wass on the top of the land I wass nearer to him—oh, yes—and

I could hef run down to the watterside—and—and been nearer—but no use that would be. I hef not been sweening since I wass a young man; I could not get out to him. And when I went back to the boat there wass the two points to go round—a long weh it was to pull, and the tide running strong—and I pulled as well as I could. I pulled as hard as ever I wass pulling ahl my life——”

“Indeed, I am sure you did your best!” said she—for it seemed pitiable that this old man should think it needful to appeal to her and justify himself.

“Well,” said her companion, seeing that Logan’s narrative had come to an end, “we have sent for a boat. Miss Ramsden would like to go across to the island; and if you have time to come with us you could show her the place where you last saw her father. Will you add this further obligation to what we already owe you?”

Old Logan was stupefied. In Gaelic he might have remonstrated, and pointed out that it would only be harrowing the feelings of the young lady; but his English was not effective for any such purpose; he had merely to acquiesce in silence; and so it befell that

when the salmon fisherman's boat, with a crew of four stalwart rowers, had been brought along, the orphaned girl and her friend, and old John Logan, too, went down to the shore, and presently were being taken across the smooth plain of water to Eilean-na-Keal.

She was showing a wonderful fortitude. No sooner had she landed than she began asking the most particular questions—apparently anxious to construct for herself a complete picture of those last minutes of her father's life. Where did he pull his boat up on the beach? Where was he, Logan? What were her father's first words? In what direction did the two of them go to explore the island, and what was the subject of their talk? Thus it was that the old man came to recall and repeat every single sentence that had been uttered between them. He told her of his complaints about Corstorphine. He told her of the approaching marriage of his granddaughter; of the young man who wanted to purchase a share in a herring-smack; of his own wish to help him in that matter; of the small prices he was getting for the lobsters; of his asking her father if he did not know Corstorphine, that perhaps he might remonstrate.

“But you need not let that trouble you,” she

said, gently; "I will take care you have enough money to buy the share in the boat."

He started somewhat, and stared at her.

"You, Mem? Oh, no, Mem! I could not be thinking of tekking money from you!" he said, with a curious earnestness that seemed to have something of dread in it.

For during all the time that they had been coming over in the boat, and all the time he had been talking to her on the island, the conviction was growing deeper in his heart that he had robbed this grief-stricken girl, and that without the possibility of restitution. When he had originally taken the locket it seemed the property of no one. Its owner was gone away out of this world; he could never come back to reclaim it; it did not belong to him any more. But now the old man knew that it belonged to this gentle-spoken young lady, who was overwhelmed with her sorrow. That was her mother's portrait, sure enough. And here—although he had robbed her of what must be of exceeding value to her—here she was proposing to do him some substantial act of kindness. The mere thought of it terrified him, somehow. It seemed to aggravate his guilt. Had he not done her enough wrong? And what would be

the luck of the herring-smack if part of its purchase-money came through his hands that were stained with crime?

They were approaching the ruined chapel—he rather lingering behind her. He was reluctant to go near; he would not enter by the narrow porch; he would have dissuaded her from going further if only he had dared. And yet what could have been more simple, if this anguish of remorse and contrition was becoming unbearable, than for him to have gone courageously forward and taken out the locket from its hiding-place, confessed his fault, and begged for her forgiveness? She seemed a kind and sympathetic creature; she was profoundly grateful to him for the efforts, however futile, he had made to rescue her father. Surely she would accept this, all the reparation he could make, and grant him pardon?

But that was not at all how the matter appeared to old John Logan. In his mind the English were a great and powerful and terrible people. Sailors had told him again and again of the vast men-of-war coming into the Clyde, of their enormous cannon, and of the thunder that shook the world when the huge guns were fired. The dread powers of government were

in England; the Queen was there, and Parliament, and the Tower that prisoners were thrown into. And if he confessed that he had robbed an English person, would he not be dragged away to that stranger country, and perhaps hanged? The English were a strong, terrible, and vindictive race—so he had heard many a time, in stories current in his boyhood's day. Not to them dared he appeal for mercy. If he made this confession, her forgiveness would avail him nothing; the inexorable powers of the law would seize him, and how would it be with his granddaughter Jeannie if he was taken away to the south and hanged?

He was less anxious and perturbed when the young lady came out of the chapel, and once more submitted to his guidance. In fact, they were following step by step the careless saunter that her father had little thought to be his last; until, finally, Logan took her to the ridge overlooking the fatal bay, and showed her, as well as he could, the precise spot at which the drowning man had disappeared. It was so lonely, this outlook. She gazed upon it with a kind of shrinking terror. Calm as the sea was, it seemed a cruel, secret, dreadful thing. The silence was awful. She stood there a long

while; and it was not until she was coming away that her forced composure entirely broke down. She had turned to cast one long, final, lingering glance towards these empty shores and the voiceless plain of the sea; and it was perhaps some sense of her complete orphanhood that was borne in upon her, or perhaps a feeling that this was a last farewell. But she gave way altogether, and, sinking to the ground, buried her head in her hands, and sobbed and cried passionately and bitterly.

“Edith!” her companion said to her, and he put his hand gently on her shoulder. “Edith, come away now! Indeed, you must come away!”

He assisted her to rise; and then, with bent head and uncertain footsteps, she made her way back to the boat. During the long pull to the mainland, she turned once or twice to regard the small island set amid the calm seas. This was indeed farewell.

Immediately on their arrival at the inn, Mr. Holt began to make preparations for their return to the south; for it was useless allowing the girl to remain in this sad neighbourhood. He got his late partner's effects put together, and without much examination; for, finding

watch, money, and papers all intact, he did not deem it necessary to make further inquiry, and it certainly never occurred to him at such a time to ask the bereaved daughter about trinkets. The men belonging to the salmon-fishery were liberally rewarded for their two days' search. Then came the question of Logan; and here it was fortunate that Archie MacEachran, who was to marry the old man's granddaughter, happened this very day to have come over from Usgary. Mr. Holt sent for him, and he came: a pleasant-looking, light-haired young fellow he was, with a quick, alert eye, though he was somewhat bashful in manner. Mr. Holt had arranged to see him alone.

"I understand you are to marry John Logan's granddaughter," the banker said to him forthwith, "and that there is some question of your buying a share in a herring-smack. Now, Miss Ramsden is very much interested in the old man—and grateful to him for having done what he could to rescue her father when he was drowning; and she would like to do something to show her gratitude. He seemed disturbed when she suggested money; I don't know why that should be so; but it has

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occurred to me that it might be managed in this way—he intends helping you to buy the share in the boat——”

“Ay, but there’s the two ways of it,” said this young man eagerly, and he could speak English freely enough, if still with a considerable accent; “he wass wanting me to tek the money ahlttogether, and I did not like the look of that, for he has not mich, and the look of it would be that I was being paid for marrying his granddaughter. No, I said, I will tek a loan of the money, and I will pay you back. The Kate and Bella is a lucky boat; the Macdowell brothers that hef her, each one of them hass money in the savings-bank; and now that one of them thinks he can do better by buying sheep and tekking them to the trysts, it is a good chance for me to get his share in the smack. Old John Logan—well, he will be wanting his own savings when he gets too old to look after the lobster-traps; and besides that he will hef to be paying some young girl to mind the house for him, when Jeannie Logan comes to me. But if he will lend me the money, ferry well; and I will pay him back when I can.”

“I think you take a very sensible view of

the situation," the banker said. "How much is this loan that you require?"

"Well, I hef got ahl the money except about twenty-four pounds."

"Twenty-four pounds," Mr. Holt repeated. "Miss Ramsden thought of giving the old man something bigger than that. However, it can be managed in this way: we will make you a loan of fifty pounds, and you will covenant to pay it back to John Logan, in instalments—extending over three years if you like. We will tell him that we have advanced you this loan on his account—to give you a fair start in your married life—and to preserve his small savings for his own need; and I dare say he won't mind taking the money in that indirect way."

"Not him, sir," the young man said, with a smile. "He knows the value of money as well as anyone. Some of them will be for saying that old John Logan is not ferry wise in the head; but I think he is clever enough about *that*; he can tell you ferry well what is due to him for interest, and how the book stands—that I know fine!"

"That's all right, then," Mr. Holt said, rising—and the other rose too, and stepped towards

the door. "There will be some papers for you to sign. Write your full name and address on an envelope, and leave it for me with the landlady before you go. You will hear later on."

"I thank ye, sir; I thank ye," the young man said; but even with the door open he lingered, standing there shamefacedly.

"There's—there's something more," he stammered. "Maybe—I don't know how to say it, but if you were to tell the young lady that we thanked her for her kindness—and—and more than that—that there's not one of us—not one of us—but would rather not hef it at ahl if we could get her father back to her alive."

The banker stepped forward and took the young man's hand for a moment.

"I will give her the message. She is a kind-hearted girl. In this case I think her kindness has been well bestowed."

And so the strangers went away; and the little hamlet of Harivaig returned to its normal condition of slumberous quiet. But this peace brought no comfort to the mind of old John Logan. Ever before him was the remembrance of the grief-stricken young lady, pale and sad-eyed, who had accompanied him over the island; and he knew that the portrait of her

mother, that by right belonged to her, was hidden away in the small chapel, and that he dared not bring it forth into the light. He had lost all intention now of giving the jewelled trinket to his granddaughter Jeannie, to adorn her on her wedding day. Even if the portrait were cut out, and deep buried in the earth, there would be something about the locket itself that he could not face. It was no longer flotsam and jetsam; it belonged to the beautiful, gentle-hearted girl who had been so kind to him and his: he had robbed her—as a requital of her bounty towards them.

The neighbours remarked that old John Logan was growing still more strange in his ways. He had hardly a word for anyone now. He seemed morose and depressed; he would not even talk about the purchase of the share in the Kate and Bella—though that was known to be a great thing for young MacEachran and Jeannie Logan; and he did not go over to Eilean-na-Keal as often as he used to do, even when the weather was quite fine. Moreover, in the little Free Church building half-way on the road to Usgary, to which the Harivaig people walked every Sabbath morning, they noticed that, more than once, when the Minister

was making a fervent appeal to the consciences of his people, John Logan, with downbent head, would answer with a perfectly audible moan. Some said that the old man was grown odder than ever in his ways simply because of the solitary life that he led out at the lobster-baskets. Others hinted that the sight of the stranger drowning had frightened him, and that he had never been quite the same since. While others again maintained that it was merely the going away of his granddaughter that was preying on his mind, and that he would soon get accustomed to it, once the wedding was over.

“Grandfather,” said Jeannie Logan to him one night—an open Bible was lying on the table before him, and she had heard him sigh heavily once or twice, as if in great distress or pain, “grandfather, is there anything wrong with you?”

“There is something wrong with me,” he answered, in the Gaelic, “that will never be made right in this world.”

“What is it, grandfather?” she asked, in sudden alarm.

But he would not speak; and as the days went by matters seemed to grow worse with

him. The neighbours wondered ; but his granddaughter could tell them nothing. At last there came one evening—he had got down the Bible, as usual, and as it was almost dark, she was just about to light the lamp.

“Jeannie,” said he, “I have something to say to you.”

“Yes, grandfather ?”

“You have been a good lass to me in this house ; and you will make a good wife. I could not wish to see you better married. The lad will do well. And you will say nothing to anyone to-night, nor yet in the morning ; but to-morrow morning I am going away.”

“Going away, grandfather !” she exclaimed. “Why, where are you going ?”

“I am going away,” he said—and as she lit the lamp at this moment, she was startled to find that there were tears running down the old man’s face. “I am going away—to—to Greenock—and maybe further than that, and maybe I will never come back to Harivaig. But you have been a good lass—and you will make a good wife.”

“Grandfather,” said she, suddenly, “are you going away on my account ? Is it because I am going to be married ?”

“No, no ; it is not that. I am glad that you will have a house of your own and a husband to look after you. It is not that ; it is of no use for you to know ; and if any of them ask you where I have gone, you can say I am away by the Dunara Castle to the south. Be a good lass, Jeannie, be a good lass ; you will have a house of your own now ; and the lad will do well.”

All her prayers and entreaties and expostulations were of no avail ; she could get no further answer from him ; nay, he enjoined her to silence ; and early in the morning—long before the hamlet of Harivaig was awake—she heard him open the door and set out. He had started on his long and weary tramp to the nearest port at which the Dunara Castle called.

CHAPTER III.

A PILGRIMAGE.

DURING that long sea-voyage to Greenock old John Logan saw many strange things, but nothing so strange as the termination of it, when, just after nightfall, the steamer slowly glided into its appointed berth alongside the

quay. He had never beheld a large town before; and although this town was invisible, the amazing extent of it could be guessed from its bewildering glare—rows of points of yellow fire gleaming afar, as if along unknown hills, fiercer white lights, and green lamps, and red lamps, down here in the harbour, while the very heavens overhead were irradiated by a dull, sombre, steady glow. When Logan, with his small bundle in his hand, left the gangway, and found himself stranded on the quay—amid these hurrying black figures, and the bewildering gas-lamps, and general confusion and noise—he knew not which way to turn. What he had in his mind was to find out the steamer that would carry him on to London; but how was he to discover her whereabouts in the dark? He had been told on board the Dunara Castle that there was such a steamer—the Anchor Line, they said. But he knew not where nor whom to ask; indeed, he was somewhat dazed, not to say frightened; he stood there irresolute, watching men and things pass by him as in some black and appalling nightmare.

And then, cautiously and fearfully, he began his quest, wandering like a ghost round the dimly-lit basins and docks. But all these

vessels seemed dead. He made bold to ask one or two of the solitary passers-by; but they did not stay to answer this old man with his hesitating speech and unintelligible questions. At last one of them, more civil than his predecessors, did stop for a second to ascertain what the old man wanted; and then, with a curt "She'll be doon the morn," he went on his way again.

So there was the long night to be passed in this terrible place. He began to look at the houses, wondering whether he dared ask at any of them for a night's lodging. His stock of money was small; and he wished to hoard it; for what was yet before him was all unknown. Moreover, a night in the open was nothing to him—had it been on the sea, that is, or on the shores of an island; what a night in the streets of a town might be, he knew not. He wandered on. He came upon a wider thoroughfare, where there was an amazing concourse of people—a double stream of people, passing along the pavement, under the gas-lamps, in front of the blazing windows of the shops. There were shouts and cries; there was a roar and rattle of wheels; the lights fell on all kinds of strange faces, many of them grimy and dis-

figured, some with unkempt hair and dissolute features, others loud-laughing with a ghastly mirth. It was like some kind of Pandemonium, into which he might fall, and be swept away; he shrank back from it; he hid himself in the gloom of one of the by-streets, and gazed forth upon it with an insatiable, terrified curiosity. And then he thought the neighbourhood of the docks would be safer for him. He would feel more at his ease if he were near the water; so he turned his back upon that flaming, roaring, turbulent highway, and set out through the silence of the dark little thoroughfare to reach the harbour and the quays.

He had proceeded some way down this little by-street when the prevailing quietude was broken in upon by the distant raucous voice of someone bawling "Ye Banks and Braes" to the discordant accompaniment of a concertina. Presently two figures loomed in sight—one of them flinging his arms about as he made this hideous din with the concertina; the other growling and cursing at his companion for the noise he was making. They proved to be two great hulking fellows—loafers about the docks, most likely; and as they came up to old John Logan, one of them, a beetle-browed, surly-

looking dog, angrily knocked the concertina out of his neighbour's hands, so as to ensure some kind of silence, while he proceeded, apparently from mere ill-temper, to cross-question John Logan as to how he came to be there and what he wanted. The old man, suspecting no ill, told him in his hesitating English that he was waiting for the steamer that was next day going to London, and that he was not sure whether to ask somewhere for a bed. By this time the brawling musician had quieted down, and seemed much interested in the stranger.

"Ye auld gomeril," said he, with rough jocularly, "what are ye aboot? Do ye no ken that my freen' here's the captain o' the verra steamer ye're gaun' in—ay, as sure 's death: what for would I tell ye a lee? And dinna ye ken that she's already cam' doon frae Glesca—she's lying in the harbour, man, and what's to prevent yer ganging on board and getting a nicht's rest in yer ain berth?"

"Ay, could I do that?" old Logan said, eagerly: here was just the fulfilment of his most anxious wishes—to get on board the vessel at once, and know that he was safe bound for London.

“Of course ye can!” the other said, gaily; while the heavy-browed ruffian stood silently by and watched. “There’s my freen’ the captain: speak him fair, and he’ll put ye on board directly, and ye’ll have yer ain bunk. Ye’ve got yer passage-money!”

“Ay,” answered the old man.

“And maybe something ower?”

“Ay, ay—maybe,” Logan said, with some hesitation.

“Ye’ll have to pay yer passage-money afore ye gang on board—that’s the rule in this line o’ steamers,” said the musician, who was gradually losing his boisterously facetious tone, and attending to this matter in a strictly business fashion. “And the best thing for ye will be to step round to the captain’s house—it’s no very far frae here—and we’ll just settle up at once, and then ye’ll gang strecht on board. It’s no safe for an auld man like you to be wanderin’ about Greenock streets: ye’ll be far better on board the ship. Come on!”

Old Logan suspected nothing. He had seen captains of coasting-vessels no better dressed than either of these men; and he was not likely to know the difference between the master of a trading-smack and the master of an Anchor

Liner. But, indeed, it was his extreme anxiety to get at once on board the steamer that induced him to consent. Without further scruple he accompanied the two strangers—down this street, across another, and along a third, until they stopped at a certain “close.” This close or entrance was pitch-dark; but the concertina-player led the way, old Logan following, and groping with his hands along the wall, the surly-browed scoundrel bringing up the rear. Then they had to ascend a stair, also in absolute darkness; but at the second landing a door was opened, and that gave some small indication of their whereabouts. They entered the house. It seemed empty, for there was not a sound of any kind; however, by the dull light of a small lamp in the lobby the old Highlander was ushered into a room, and there the leader of the party struck a match and lit a candle that was on the chimney-piece. It was a dingy little den; but Logan was not thinking of his surroundings: it was the steamer that concerned him.

The door was made fast behind them: the candle was placed on the table.

“Now, my decent old freen’,” the concertina-player began, resuming his jocular manner,

“we’ll jist settle this business at once. Out wi’ the little bits o’ dibs! And ye may just as weel hand us ower the lot: ye’ll no want any money till ye get to London. Come on!—let’s see what ye’ve got. Is’t in a stocking? I’m vexed I canna offer ye a dram to croon the bargain; but never mind—just hand us ower what ye’ve got, and I’ll gie ye a receipt at Marti’mas.”

And now it was that old John Logan began to realise the position in which he found himself; and it was impossible to say which was the more disquieting—this bantering that was growing near to bullying, or the sinister silence with which the other confederate stood and looked on.

“I’ll—I’ll pay when I get on board the steamer,” the old man said, and instinctively he turned and glanced towards the door.

“Will ye now?” the concertina-player rejoined, with a burst of laughter. “Weel, that’s a guid ane! Ye’re a funny auld deevle!” He put both elbows on the table, rested his head in his hands, and stared mockingly at old Logan. “Do ye no think this is a fine, quate place to do our wee bit o’ business? Ye wadna disappoint the captain? If ye speak him fair, maybe

he'll leave ye the price o' a dram. I'm getting awfu' dry mysel'; and I wish ye'd bring out they bonnie pound-notes—or is it a' in half-croons and shillins, in a nice wee bag?"

But here his accomplice broke in impatiently.

"Oh, stop your jaw!" he said; and then he turned to Logan: "Here, oot wi' that money!"

"Ay, that's it, Tam," the other said, complacently, "you get the money, and I'll just hae a look at the bundle—maybe there's a braw saytin waistcoat that'll dae for my weddin'."

He reached across, and would have seized the bundle, but that the old man—now thoroughly alarmed—snatched it out of his grasp and made forthwith for the door. Instantly the more taciturn of the two scoundrels placed himself in his way; whereupon Logan, wild with fright, dropped his bundle, and gripped the man with both hands, to hurl him on one side. The attack was so sudden—the strength of the old man so unexpected—that this heavy-built brute was taken aback—his one foot tripped over the other—he staggered a step or two and fell headlong before he had time to clutch at anything but the useless wall. Logan turned in haste to pick up his bundle, only to find that the other bully was rushing at him with an

uplifted poker. The blow would have fallen on his head, but that he warded it off with his arm; and then, in desperation, he drove at this fellow as he had driven at the other—with the whole weight of his heavy shoulders—sending him crashing against the table. In an instant everything was in blackness. The candle had been knocked over. And now, for a moment, it was just possible that the old man might have got safely away if he could have found the door at once; but instead of the door he stumbled against the more burly of the two ruffians, who seized and tried to hold him, while the other, with the most horrible threats and imprecations, was endeavouring to find a match to light the candle. And no sooner was the room lit again than the scrimmage recommenced; for the old man fought with the fury of a wild cat. It was not his money he was fighting for, nor yet his little bundle of clothes, but for the safety of a certain treasure sewn up in the lining of his coat, of the existence of which they little dreamed. Of course, such an unequal struggle could have but one end. A blow on the head with the poker knocked him senseless; and he knew no more.

When he came to himself—he had no idea

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how long thereafter—there was a fierce glare of yellow light striking into his dazed eyes. It was a policeman's lantern. He was lying on the pavement outside; and when the policeman helped him up to a sitting position, it was seen that his white hair was bedabbled with blood.

“Ye're an auld chap to hae been fechtin',” the policeman said, in no unkindly way. “How came ye to be in such a state as this? Ye're no drunk, too! Weel, ye'll hae to get up and gang wi' me to the office, and gie an account of yoursel'.”

But the first thing that old John Logan did on regaining consciousness was quickly to put his hand to his side. It was enough. He felt the hard substance there under the cloth. They had robbed him of his little bundle of clothes, and plundered him of every penny, but they had not discovered the jewelled trinket, the restitution of which would make such reparation as was now possible, and perchance mitigate in some measure the remorse and anguish of his soul. Obediently, like a child, he did what the policeman told him. He gave him what account he could of the circumstances leading up to the robbery, and of the robbery itself; but he could not say which of the “closes” in this dark little

thoroughfare was the one he had been induced to enter, for the thieves had taken the precaution of dragging him some little way along the pavement after fetching him out. And obediently, if somewhat slowly—for he was faint and weak from want of blood—he accompanied the policeman to the station. Here he told his story over again, and had the wounds on his head dressed; and the inspector on duty, finding that the old man had been left without a farthing, would have allowed him to pass the night in one of the cells. But John Logan would not hear of that; nor would he listen to the proposal that he should remain in Greenock for a time to see whether the detectives could not discover the thieves who had robbed him, and perhaps get back some of the stolen property. His mind was set on London. The steamer was coming down the Clyde the next day. If he had no money, perhaps they would let him work his passage as a deck hand. So, as well as he was able, he thanked the people at the police-office for their kind treatment of him, and went forth again into the night.

But this time, while he was still anxious to get down to the harbour, with the vague instinct that he would somehow be safer near

the water, he kept to the thoroughfares where he saw plenty of people. In this wise he made his way along Cathcart Street, and down the lane leading to the Custom House, until at length he found himself on the quay. Out there was the black water; and afar he could see the red and green sailing-lights of the steamers passing up and down the estuary. There was hardly anyone on this wide, open breadth of stone; so he wandered along, looking for some corner of a shed where he might rest for the night. For it was getting late; and the old man was weak and exhausted; moreover, there was a singing in his head that seemed to stupefy him; so that, when he happened in his wandering search to come upon a barrow that was chained to a post—it was dark here, and he thought no one would disturb him—he crept on to it, and lay down with his arm for a pillow, and with his other hand clasped over the jewelled toy that had brought him so much tribulation.

CHAPTER IV.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

BUT there was not much sleep for old John Logan. His circumstances were too desperate. He gave up the hope of being able to work his passage to London; they would not take an old white-haired man. Nor did he think of going by road; the distance, to his imagination, was immeasurable; he would die of hunger by the way. And if that were to be the end, there would be no restitution and atonement; his secret would be buried with him; there would be no chance of begging for forgiveness from the gentle-voiced, sad-eyed young lady who had been so kind to them all. Nay, on the awful day of Judgment, when he was arraigned as a thief, would she not be there, summoned to confront him as his accuser? How could he make known then what his contrition had been? She would stand opposite him; she would recognise him as the man for whose grand-daughter she had done so much; and she would know him to be a thief. London seemed the width of worlds away. And so was Harivaig, too, to

one who was penniless. He could not get back, if he had wished to get back. But he did not wish it. His life contained but one burning desire, and all things else were unregarded. So the night passed, in fruitless longings; in wild, pathetic visions of fulfilment; in the contemplation of failure, and leaden despair; and as he lay there, worn out and sleepless, with an aching head and a heavy heart, there gradually came into the eastern heavens a wan grey light that broadened and widened up until the new day was shining over land and sea.

He rose from his hard and restless couch, and looked around him with dazed eyes. The wide waters of the Firth were all of a shimmering grey; far away on the other side was the wooded promontory of Roseneath, with the big castle on a clearance between the trees; there were white villages along the further shores, under the low-lying hills. The business of the work-a-day world had already begun; there were vessels going up and down—here a small tug towing after it a mass of floating timber, there a larger steamer taking a big three-master away up the river. Along the quays, too, near at hand, signs of life were becoming visible; so in case anyone should complain of his having

appropriated this not very desirable bed, he got on his feet again and began to wander back in the direction of the town. He had no thought of finding the two men who had robbed him—still less of recovering what they had taken from him. Indeed, he hardly knew what he was doing; only, the inspector at the police-office had spoken kindly to him, and he seemed to be drawn back thither, if he could but hit upon the way. There might be some word of advice. Anyhow, he wandered on.

He could not, however, discover the whereabouts of the police-station, and his hopes in that direction were too vague to prompt him to ask his way of a stranger. But now that the activities of the streets were declaring themselves in every direction—the shops being opened, the passers-by increasing in number—each moment seemed to add to his dismay at the thought that the steamer would soon be arriving, and would leave the quay again and set forth on its long voyage to London, while he was left in this unknown town, among all these unknown people. The more he considered this probability, the more terrible it seemed. If only he could send to Harivaig for the money to pay his passage!

It was impossible. Days—he knew not how many—would have to elapse before an answer could be got; and in the meantime how was he to live? But it was the thought of the steamer coming into the quay within the next few hours that rendered him almost desperate. He began to look at the passers-by individually, wondering whether there was not some friendly soul amongst them who would lend him what he wanted. He had money at home. He would pay the loan twice over—if only he could get on at once to London. Even if he never returned to Harivaig—for as to what might befall him he was all uncertain—there were those there who would see that the money was honourably repaid.

But, as it chanced, Dame Fortune was bent this morning on making amends to old John Logan for her evil treatment of him on the previous night. As he was wandering along, regarding this one and that, he came upon a corner public-house that had just been opened, the proprietor of which was standing at the door, with his hands behind his back. He was a tall, thin man, with an aquiline nose, keen grey eyes, and light reddish-brown hair—in short, a Sutherlandshire-looking man; while

there was an expression of easy good-nature about his features that was calculated to invite confidence. Old Logan hesitated—turned away—went back again—and finally, when this tall Highland-looking man retired into the shop, he followed, after a moment's pause. But when he entered, he could see no one but a young fellow who was busy polishing up the brass of the bar. Logan waited in silence. The young man turned to him.

“Weel, what is't?”

“I—I wass going to London,” Logan began, in a breathless kind of way, “and—and—they hef stolen ahl my money; and I wass thinking that if I could get the loan of the money to tek me to London, I would pay it back——”

“Money to tak ye to London!” the barkeeper retorted, scornfully. “Yer heed's in a creel! Get oot o' this!”

John Logan was turning hopelessly away when the proprietor of the public-house came forth from the back premises.

“What's that, Jimmy?”

His assistant told him, with a laugh of derision. John Logan was still lingering there: the new-comer, with keen but not unkindly eyes, was scanning him from head to heel.

"Where do ye come from?" he asked.

"From Harivaig," Logan answered; "that is across the point from Usgary."

"Usgary?" the tall man repeated. "Then I suppose you have the Gaelic."

"Oh, yes, indeed—yes, indeed!" old Logan exclaimed, eagerly; and then, to his unspeakable surprise and rejoicing, he found this stranger talking to him in his native tongue.

"Tell me what has happened to you, and why you have come all the way from Usgary to Greenock, an old man like you."

There was no impediment now; with a sort of feverish haste old Logan told the story of what had befallen him—though he said nothing of the aim of his journey to London—and described his present straits; and if he did not directly beg for money to carry him on, he was eager to point out that the loan would be assuredly repaid.

"Well," said the other, continuing to talk in the Gaelic, "you are a foolish man to go into a house that you did not know; and if I were to lend you the money how should I be sure you would not fling it away in the same fashion?"

"But if I can get enough to pay for the steamer, that is all I want," Logan said, with

anxious eyes. "If I can get to London that is all I want. There is one Corstorphine there who knows me."

"If it comes to that, and you are so anxious to get to London, why do you not go in the train? You can leave Greenock to-night and be in London in the morning."

"The train?—I have heard about that, but I do not know it."

"Have you never seen a railway train?"

"No."

The tall, good-natured-looking publican seemed amused. He took down his Glengarry cap, and put it on his head.

"Come," said he, "and I will show you what a train is like."

Then, as they walked along the street, he said :

"And perhaps I will lend you the money, and you will find yourself in London to-morrow morning. For blood is thicker than water, as everyone knows; and I am sorry that one from the north, and a Highlander like myself, should have been robbed by these Lowland devils. It is a good thing to have the Gaelic when you meet with a Highlander; and that is the truth."

However, the publican's intentions were of no avail, in this direction at least. When they had climbed up the long flight of stairs, and entered the wide, hollow-sounding station, a train was just arriving at the platform—the huge black engine coming along with its ponderous clink-clank; and then, when it stopped, there was a sudden rush and roar of escaped steam, that caused old Logan to start back with terror on his face.

“Well, now you have seen a train,” his companion said; “and do you know that it can take you to London in a dozen hours?”

Logan was silent for a moment or two; then he said—

“God knows that I am anxious to go to London; and if it is on foot I must go, then it is on foot that I will be going; but it is not in *that* that I am going.”

Nor would anything shake his resolution; and his newly-found friend, seeing that the old man could not be reasoned out of this unconquerable dread, good-naturedly assented to his taking the longer route by steamer, and said he should have enough money to pay his passage. Not only that, but, discovering that Logan had had no breakfast, he took him into

a coffee-shop and gave him a substantial meal; he presented him with a supply of tobacco for the voyage; altogether, he played the part of good Samaritan; and the only receipt he took for the money he advanced was the address of Logan's relatives in the north. Moreover, he came down to the wharf to see the old man away; and as the big steamer stood out to the rippling waters of the Firth, he waved his Glengarry cap once or twice before turning and going back to his shop. That was the last of him that John Logan ever saw; but the old man did not forget his countryman, nor the help he had got from him in time of sore need.

The long voyage southward proved to be quite uneventful; and he was looking forward without any great apprehension to his landing in London, for he had been told that the St. Katharine Dock, where the steamer would reach her berth, was not far from Billingsgate. He received this information from a wily-looking little foreign sailor, who, like himself, was one of the steerage-passengers, and who had attached himself to the old man, professing great friendship soon after their leaving Greenock. He was a small, yellow-faced, crop-haired creature,

who wore rings in his ears, who had a sleek, insinuating manner, and looked of southern birth, though what English he knew sounded rather as if it had been picked up in the north of Europe. He had been all over the world, according to his own account ; and was returning to London after having been summoned to Scotland to give evidence in a salvage case. He had a pack of cards with him, and would have beguiled the time in playing these with this new acquaintance, only that he found the old man had a superstitious horror of the "devil's books." Logan's refusal did not interrupt their intimacy ; on the contrary, Vedroz, as he called himself, became more and more friendly, and showed his sympathetic concern by asking innumerable questions, that John Logan sometimes answered, and sometimes did not answer.

One day, the shifty-eyed dusky-faced little sailor said, in an off-hand kind of fashion—

"My vrent, you 'ave pain—no ?—in your left side ?"

John Logan, looking somewhat alarmed, said that he had no pain there.

"No ?—vy you put up your hant so often ? No pain ? You 'ave no rheumatics dare ? No ?

Vell, I vas make mistake. Das its nodings. Ver glad you 'ave no pain."

And then again, the same afternoon, he began to talk to the old Highlander about the best way of concealing valuables about one's person; and the straits he, Vedroz, had been put to in protecting himself against rogues and thieves. The waistband of his trousers seemed to be his favourite hiding-place. If you sewed the money into the lining of your coat—so he said, watching the old man's face the while—the coat might be torn off in a scuffle, or stolen when you were asleep. The subject seemed to interest him; he returned to it again and again; but John Logan, though he looked more and more anxious, only held his peace. He made no confession; but sometimes he would ask, as if to be reassured, how far the St. Katherine's Docks were from Billingsgate.

When at last, after a voyage so long that it appeared to him that he had been carried away out of the world altogether, they arrived at their destination, and were free to leave the ship, Vedroz undertook to show the old man the way to Billingsgate Market, and would take no refusal. And indeed Logan was not a little terrified at the sight of the vastness of the

place into which he was about to plunge; and was glad of this friendly escort. It was as yet early morning when they made their way into Upper East Smithfield; though already there were heavy vans and lorries, making a dull, continuous, distant roar through the solitude of the half-sleeping city. Vedroz bent his steps eastward, talking lightly all the while. Old John Logan kept looking out for Billingsgate, which he expected to recognise by its piles of fish-boxes; but he saw nothing of the kind. Soon they had got into one of the lowest districts in Shadwell; and Vedroz was airily explaining, in his broken English, that the distances in London were so great that one had to exercise patience.

“And ’ere is my ’ouse,” said he, “up this court ’ere. You vill come up vid me?—No?—Why no?—one moment?—I keep you no one moment—den we go on to Billingsgate.”

Logan followed him; but he was resolved upon entering no house. When they had got a little way up this narrow court, Vedroz knocked at a certain door; and that was immediately opened by a colossally tall, broad-shouldered, muscular-looking woman of hideous

aspect, who glanced quickly from the one to the other of them.

"My vrent, dis is my vife," Vedroz said, leading the way into the passage. "Anna, dis is a vrent of mine from Scotland. Come in! No? No for one second? My Gott, why you no come in?"

But old John Logan resolutely declined; and for a moment Vedroz seemed disconcerted. Then he said—

"Ver' well. You stay there; I come back directly. You talk to my vife: Anna, see if my goot vrent will no come into the 'ouse."

He left, and was absent for several minutes, while the huge-limbed virago, instead of repeating the invitation, merely stood and stared at the old man in a stony silence. Then Vedroz made his appearance again, bearing in his hand a pewter tankard.

"'Ere, my vrent," said he, still standing within the passage; "'ere is a drink for you—oh, ver' good drink!—ver' good drink in the morning!"

But again John Logan declined, and firmly; and the little sallow-faced sailor's eyes began to burn with concealed rage.

"My Gott, why you no drink? You dink it

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will do 'arm?—no 'arm!—ver' good for you—'ere, drink!"

And he held out the tankard again—inviting the old man to step into the passage. But John Logan was resolved. He would not drink—he would not enter the house. Then Vedroz, his eyes sparkling with anger, came to the door; he glanced up and down the court to see that there was no one about: then he said, in a low voice,

"Anna—quick—bring him in!"

With a bound like a tigress the huge creature sprang upon the old man, and fixed both hands on his coat-collar; and the next moment he would have been dragged off his feet and into the house, but that with an extraordinary effort he pitched the whole weight of his shoulders against her chest so that they both reeled against the half-opened door. He sent up loud shouts of alarm; he fought and tore to get out of this terrible grip; and all at once he found himself thrown violently backwards—free as air—and the door shut in his face! He made instant use of his liberty. He did not stay to ask what had frightened his assailants; he hastily picked up his cap, that had been knocked off in the struggle, ran down the court and out

into the street, and looked wildly around for help. Well; there was plenty, if need were. But he was not pursued; and he had no wish to go back to that den, even with assistance; so he hurriedly walked on—he knew not in what direction; but only anxious to get away from this dreadful neighbourhood. As it chanced, he took pretty much the same route that he had come; and presently he was in the High-street of Shadwell, where, there being now plenty of people about, he could breathe a little more freely, and consider as to what he should do. His heart was beating with a frightful violence; but the treasure sewn in the lining of his coat was safe.

Well, it took him a considerable time to find his way from Shadwell to Billingsgate Market, for he walked slowly, and he carefully scanned the appearance of anyone whom he approached to ask his simple question. But he did get there in the end, without further peril or adventure; and to his own surprise—for the roar of traffic, the number of people, the mass of houses, and shops, and yards, and waggons were all bewildering to him—he was not long in finding out the place of his search. And then it was—in a small counting-house at the back of some

wide premises—that old John Logan found himself at last face to face with the actual Corstorphine, who had for so many years been to him but a name.

CHAPTER V.

ABSOLUTION.

MR. CORSTORPHINE was a jovial-looking, stout, rotund person, with a florid face, and bright, twinkling, small blue eyes.

“So you’re John Logan?” said he, in a very friendly fashion. “Take a seat—take a seat. And what’s brought ye to London? To collect your accounts? I dare say there’s something in your favour in our books—I’ll just see——”

“No,” said the old man, “it is not that at ahl. I—I hef come to London to—to speak to Mr. Holt—that wass the name—and I wass thinking you would tell me where to find him.”

“Holt?” said Mr. Corstorphine. “Holt? Oh, yes; by-the-bye, that was a sad business that happened up your way; I saw it all in the papers. You mean Holt, of Ramsden, Holt,

don't you? Is it about the drowning of Mr. Ramsden you've come up to London?"

John Logan looked at the other straight in the face; he was not sure what to answer. Certain speeches of his own he had in a measure prepared; but he was not ready with replies to questions.

"Ay," said he, with deliberation, "it hass something to do with that."

Mr. Corstorphine waited for a moment, but the old man was silent; so, not caring to be too curious, he good-naturedly said:

"Oh, well, if you want to see Mr. Holt, I don't suppose there will be any difficulty. Their office is in Lombard-street."

"Ay?" said the old man, looking rather downcast. "Is it far aweh?"

"Not at all; a few minutes' walk. Are you going on there now?"

Logan hesitated; he hardly knew how to formulate the request that was in his mind.

"I am not knowing mich about towns," said he, slowly.

"Oh, but I'll send one of my lads with you," Corstorphine said at once.

"Ay, will ye do that?" the old man answered, looking up quickly and gratefully. "I wass

thinking of it many's the time—maybe ye would do that. For I am not knowing mich about towns—and—and—my head is not quite right since they struck me in Greenock—and if there wass a young lad now to tek me to Mr. Holt—I would pay the young lad——”

“You will do nothing of the kind,” Corstorphine said, good-humouredly. “Come along, and I'll see you safe on the way to Lombard-street.”

Thus it was that old John Logan found himself plunged into the very heart of the great city, in the busiest time of the forenoon. His guide soon discovered that he was a total stranger, and was so civil as to point out the Monument to him; but Logan took little notice of that—it was the dense, hurrying mass of people that overawed him. The lad with difficulty got him to cross to the western side of Gracechurch-street—he was afraid of venturing into that roaring Maelström; and, indeed, he had to take the old man by the arm and haul him this way and that, or they would never have got safely through the surging stream of cabs and waggons and omnibuses. Old Logan was quite breathless when they got to Lombard-street—not from physical exertion, but from the excite-

ment caused by this strange, bewildering spectacle, and the mental contagion of all this eager haste. Indeed, when they reached the bank, and when his companion briefly informed him that this was Ramsden, Holt's, he hesitated about entering, for in this distracting whirl he had forgotten the speeches he had prepared during those idle days on board the steamer.

But here a fortunate circumstance happened. A brougham drove up, and there stepped from it no other than Mr. Holt himself, whose eye instantly fell on this unwonted figure that was near the door of the bank.

"Bless me!" he said, going up to Logan, "how have you come here? Do you bring any news? Has the body been found?"

John Logan was startled by so sudden an encounter; he regarded this tall, keen-looking man with a troubled eye.

"No," he managed to say at last, and he shook his head.

"But you have come to see me?" the other asked, promptly.

"Ay, ay," Logan made answer. "I—I was wanting——"

"But come in, first of all," the banker said. "Come to my room—then we'll hear what

you've got to say," and he led the way into the bank, and upstairs to his own room, where he shut the door, and asked John Logan to be seated.

"Well, now, what can I do for you?" said he, pleasantly enough. "Was not that arrangement about the boat satisfactory? I thought the young man was very well content; and he seems an honest fellow—I think you may count on the instalments being paid."

Old John Logan was looking all around him: this place in which he found himself was like a house; had he arrived at the goal of his long journey already!

"It's the young lady," said he, turning vaguely inquiring eyes upon the banker.

"What young lady? Miss Ramsden?"

"Ay, ay," the old man said, with a kind of breathless eagerness. "It's to see her I hef come ahl the way—and—and I wass thinking you would tell me where to find her. If it is only for a moment—she was ferry, ferry kind to us—and—and if she would not think it trouble—only for a moment——"

"But what do you want to see her about?" Mr. Holt naturally asked: then directly something in the old man's face told him he had

been indiscreet. "Ah, I see it is something you have got to say to herself. Very well; there can be no objection. I dare say it must be something of importance to have brought you so far; and I dare say, too, she will tell me all about it later on. However, if you want to see her, you will almost certainly find her at home this morning. If she is out, wait till she returns—she is pretty sure to be back by lunch-time. I will give you a card, and you will show it to the man who opens the door; and I will send a commissionaire with you to take you to the house, for I suppose you'd never make your way to Cornwall-gardens by yourself."

As well as he was able, the old man expressed his grateful thanks; and presently he was out once more in the wild Babel of confusion, under the guidance of this taciturn commissionaire. But now he felt that every step was taking him nearer and nearer to the end and aim of his journey. His heart shook within him as he thought of the ordeal before him; and his only wish was that it were well over and done with. He did not care what happened to him after that. The atonement once made to *her*, they might take him away and put him in gaol or

hang him if they wished. It was of no consequence whether he ever went back to Harivaig. He was an old man; his days were about done anyway; and his granddaughter Jeannie would be well provided for and comfortably settled with her husband in their new home in Usgary.

Meanwhile the commissionaire who was acting as his guide had met with the same difficulty that the Greenock publican had experienced: old John Logan could not be induced to enter a train. Indeed, his dismay on being asked to go by an underground tunnel was even greater than before; so the commissionaire had to sacrifice the tickets he had purchased at the Mansion House Station, had to ascend to the upper air again, and take his charge down to Kensington on the top of an omnibus. Even that method of travelling seemed to the old fisherman to be fraught with imminent danger; but no doubt his fear of falling off helped in a measure to distract his mind from thinking of the trying interview that was now drawing near.

When they reached the large mansion in Cornwall-gardens to which they had been directed, the servant who opened the door stared with surprise and even resentment at

this old man who had dared to ring the visitors' bell; but his manner changed somewhat when he was shown Mr. Holt's card. He said that Miss Ramsden was out riding just then, but that she would be back in half an hour or so; and would he step in and wait? The commissionaire, having seen his task accomplished, left; and old John Logan entered the house. The man-servant hesitated as to whether he should ask this odd-looking visitor, whose clothes and cap had suffered a good deal in his rough experiences of travel, to go any further than the hall. But Logan settled that matter for himself; he sate down on a chair that happened to be handy, and the footman, with another curious glance, disappeared, and left the old man alone.

The moment he had departed, John Logan whipped off his coat, took out his sailor's jack-knife, and slit open a sewed patch in the inside lining. The locket that had cost him so much was in his hand. He undid the piece of canvas in which it was wrapped, and placed that in his pocket. He hastily put on his coat again, and then he sate still, waiting with the trinket that he had hardly dared to look on, clasped and hidden in his trembling fingers.

He heard the sound of horses' hoofs without. The servant who had let him in came along the hall and opened the door. There was a tall, fair-haired young lady in a black riding-habit coming up the steps. A young man, rather older than herself, immediately followed. The groom was leading away the horses. John Logan rose to his feet, though his heart was beating and his legs were shaking so that he could hardly stand. The world seemed to swim round him. He did not know that she turned very pale on catching sight of him, and came quickly forward, and asked him what he had come to tell her?

"Is it about my father?" she said, hurriedly.

For a moment he could not speak, he was all trembling so; then he said:

"No, no, Mem. I wass come to gif you back something—something that wass yours—and it is a long weh I have come to—to——"

She saw that he was strongly agitated—and also that he glanced in a timorous fashion at her cousin, who was standing by.

"Mem," said the old man, in a sort of desperation, "will you be that kind—I wass thinking to see you by yourself——"

"Fred, wait for me in the drawing-room,"

she said instantly. And then, quickly laying aside her hat and riding-whip, she took the old man gently by the hand. "Come in here," she said, leading him into the dining-room, and shutting the door behind them. "I see you are greatly distressed. What is it about? Can I help you? It is not about your granddaughter, is it, that was to be married? If I can help you, I'm sure I will!"

The old man stood helpless, bewildered, shaking from head to foot—his English was all gone from him—he could not explain: then, with a half-stifled cry of anguish, he threw himself at her feet, his two clenched hands on the floor, tears streaming from his eyes, his white head bowed with the violence of his sobbing.

"*Má-an-nus!—má-an-nus!—má-an-nus!*"* was all he could say, in this overwhelming grief, in the despair of his appeal to her.

"But what is it?" she asked, in great alarm and commiseration, for it seemed so pitiable to see this white-haired old man so utterly stricken down.

He unclasped one of his hands, and put the locket at her feet.

* Properly *mathanas*—compassion, mercy, forgiveness.

"I hef brought it," he said—though his voice was so broken with his sobs that she could only make out a word or two here and there; "if you hef no pardon for me—I cannot tell what that will be for me—when I took it, I wass not thinking it wass anybody's—I had neffer seen you, Mem—God knows, I would not hef taken anything from you—but—but the clothes they were lying on the shore—and—and there wass no one—and I wass thinking of my lass Jeannie, and of her getting married, and not with the things that some of the young lasses hef for their wedding-day—it—it is your pardon, Mem, I am asking—it is your pardon I am praying for—and if you hef no pardon for me, then God help me—for I—for I——"

But here he broke into another fit of passionate crying and sobbing, so that he could not proceed with his appeal to her for forgiveness. As for her, the tears were running down her own cheeks; this seemed so piteous a thing. She knelt down on one knee, and took up the locket.

"I think I understand you," she said, very gently. "Well; you have brought it back—what more could you do? I do forgive you—indeed, indeed I do forgive you!"

He seized the hem of her dress, and kissed it again and again.

"I wass not thinking," he continued, between his sobs, "that it belonged to any one. And there wass Jeannie, she wass going to be married—and—and I thought the young lad would be prouder of her. Mem, I did not know it wass yours—I did not; and when you wass coming to Harivaig—after that, there wass no peace for me, day or night; and I wass asking myself, day and night, if the young lady would gif me her pardon, if I went aweh to London——"

"And indeed, indeed I do!" the girl said, in deep commiseration. "Come!" she said, putting her hand on his shoulder. "Come and tell me how you made such a long journey. I did miss the locket, and could not imagine where it had gone. But now you have brought it back—and come such a long way to restore it—well, now, you must not say a word more about it."

Old John Logan rose and wiped his wet cheeks with the back of his hand, and took a step towards the door.

"The long weh I hef come, Mem," said he, pausing now and again to gather his speech,

"wass to gif back what I had taken—and—and to ask for your pardon. Now you hef been kind to me—more kind to me as I deserve—and—and that is ofer now—and God bless you for it, Mem. That is ofer now—but there's the other people—and I will tell them what I hef done—and if it is to be hanged I am, then it will not matter so much to be hanged now, since I hef your pardon. And now I will say good-bye to you, Mem; and God will bless you as you hef been merciful to me this day."

She guessed his meaning directly; and in an instant she had interposed herself between him and the door.

"No," said she, courageously, "you are not going like that, or with any such intention. What has been done has been settled and forgiven between you and me; and no one else has the right to interfere. *No one else* has got anything to do with it. If you like, it will be a secret between you and me: not a word to be said. And I am not going to let you leave the house like this." She put her hand on his arm. "Come," she said, quite cheerfully, so as to reassure him, and calm down his violent distress and agitation, "I want you to tell me

all about your coming here, and I want to know what you are going to do before you go back. I suppose you have no friends in London—unless you will call me your friend? I want you to tell me about your granddaughter, and the marriage, and what you are going to buy in London to take to her for her wedding-day. If she would not be offended, I should like to send her some things; and perhaps she would rather be pleased to have them come all the way from London.”

Her calm and soothing tones prevailed; he suffered himself to be led towards the window, and he took a seat there, she sitting opposite him in the embrasure. He understood that he was asked for the story of his adventures since leaving Harivaig, and he began and in the most simple fashion related the various incidents as well as his halting speech would allow. She was greatly concerned when he told her about the fighting in the Greenock den; and declared he must see a surgeon in London, to make sure his wounds had been properly dressed, and were healing satisfactorily; and then, when he brought his narrative down to this very day, and when she discovered that he had had nothing to eat or drink since very early that

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morning, she went promptly to the mantelpiece and rang the bell.

The footman appeared.

“Luncheon, Richard—and tell Mrs. Moulseley and Mr. Hare.”

She turned to the old man.

“You will stay and have some lunch with me?” she said.

“Oh, no, Mem!” said he, glancing nervously at the table—which was already laid.

“But you must! Why, how many hours is it since you left the steamer this morning?”

Presently an elderly lady appeared, followed by the young man who had been out riding with Miss Ramsden—a tall young Englishman of the familiar blonde type. The moment young Hare perceived that the old fisherman was still in the dining-room, and apparently was going to stay to lunch, he said to his cousin—

“Edith!”

It was a kind of summons: she followed him out into the hall.

“Why, what are you going to do now?” he said, by way of friendly remonstrance.

She stepped into the morning-room opposite, to be out of the way of the servants, and he accompanied her.

"This is an old man who has come a long way," she said to him; "and I am interested in him; and I have asked him to take lunch with me—that is all."

"How silly you are!" he said. "Why——"
She flushed up a little.

"You need not come in to luncheon unless you like!" she said, somewhat stiffly.

He looked at her, and smiled, and made bold to take her hand.

"So you want to quarrel, do you? My dear Edith, you don't know how. You haven't got it in you. You can't fight—you haven't got the weapons—what is it?—

Un sourire qui dit: Bataille!

Un soupir qui dit: Je me rends!

that's the way *you* would fight, if you were to try."

She withdrew her hand none the less.

"You don't know how I am interested in this old man," she said, "and you don't know what a pitiable story he has just told me. But it is of no consequence. As I say, you need not come in to luncheon unless you like."

"Edith, don't be stupid!" he made answer, quite good-naturedly. "I was not thinking of myself at all; I was thinking of your ancient

friend—whom you will make extremely uncomfortable. Do you imagine you are doing him any kindness? He would be a great deal happier if you would let him have his dinner in the servants' hall."

"Well, then, he is not going down to the servants' hall," was her reply.

"And I," said he, with a bit of a laugh, "am not going to be debarred from sitting next to you at luncheon simply because you choose to be cantankerous. Come along; if you keep Mrs. Moulseley waiting another minute she'll snap your head off," and with that he put his hand lightly on her shoulder and shoved her out of the room before him.

But old John Logan was far too preoccupied to be in any way embarrassed or uncomfortable when the young lady insisted on his taking a place next her at table; nor did he seem to perceive how assiduous she was in paying him little friendly attentions. His mind was intently fixed on quite other things. The servants placed various dishes before him; he paid no heed. The butler filled his glass; he did not look at it.

"But you are not eating anything!" his young hostess said.

"I wass not thinking of it," he answered, simply; and then he relapsed into a brooding silence, as if there was no outward world for him at all.

She began to wonder what this was that was weighing so heavily on his thoughts. Had she not fully satisfied him of her forgiveness? Had she not been explicit enough? Or was there still in his mind some dark imagining that quite outside the sphere of her acquittal there dwelt unknown terrors of punishment and vengeaunce? The moment that luncheon was over, she allowed her other two companions to leave, and desired the old man to remain with her. And then an adroit question or two soon made the matter more or less clear.

"It is you, Mem, who hef been kind to me," said he, fixing his eyes on the table before him, as if to seek out this that was troubling him; while she listened to him patiently and in silence, as he slowly constructed sentence after sentence. "And when I wass leaving Hari-vaig, I did not know whether I would ever be finding you; and now you wass giffing me your pardon; and what more is to happen to me, that I do not heed now, since you had mercy for me. But—but you said a secret. If I wass

to go back to Harivaig, I would be thinking—ahl the day long, sometimes in the night too. I would be thinking there would be some one coming. He would say to me, ‘You hef a secret, and that iss good as between the young lady and you; but the judges are not satisfied—there iss more to be done yet.’ And now I am here in this town, where the judges are, I—I would sooner go to them. If they hef no pardon for me—well, I am an old man; it is not much matter now; and Jeannie would neffer know anything about it. When I wass coming through the streets I looked for them; but I wass not seeing them anywhere. And now, Mem, I will go. Whateffer happens there iss my thanks to you for your goodness to me; and I had no right to expect so mich from you. But I am not thinking of going back to Harivaig with a secret—and be waiting and waiting for the judges.”

She was quick to perceive what all this meant.

“But you don’t understand!” she said, with an almost pathetic eagerness. “It need not be a secret unless you like—that must be just as you wish—but I mentioned a secret merely because it is nobody else’s business but yours and mine. No one can interfere now; it is settled.

Surely you have suffered enough—surely you have made sufficient atonement: and if I say that—if I tell you that—who can interfere? The judges would not think of harming you. You might live all the rest of your life in London—you might walk through the streets every day—and nobody would think of meddling with you. Indeed,” she said—for it suddenly occurred to her that the best way of assuring him of his safety would be to familiarise him with the London streets and the sight of the great official buildings and the repositories of power and authority, “I’m going to ask you to remain in London for a day or two, and go about, and see what the place is like. That is, until I can find some little presents for you to take home to your granddaughter, for the wedding. And there are a lot of things you have to do,” she continued, in a brisk and matter-of-fact way, “before you can set out again for the North. You ought at once to send your friend in Greenock, who was so kind to you, the money he lent you—and if you haven’t got it——”

“But, ay, ay!” he said, quickly; “there’s Corstorphine! There’s some money that Corstorphine is owing to me——”

"Well, we'll arrange about that later on," said she. "In the meantime I want you to see a little of London, and I'll get you some one who will take you about."

For so gentle-mannered and smooth-spoken a young lady she had a prompt and business-like way of going about things. She rang the bell. The footman appeared.

"Tell Kemp I want to see him at once," she said. "If he is round at the stables send for him."

"Yes, Miss."

A few minutes thereafter she was told that Kemp was in the hall; and immediately she left the room, shutting the door behind her.

"I sha'n't want the carriage this afternoon, Kemp," she said to this grave, stout, elderly person, who, in fact, was her coachman.

"Very well, Miss."

"But there is an old fisherman here, who has come from the North to see me, and you must look after him, and find lodgings for him for a night or two. Has your wife let that room that is next to yours?"

"No, Miss."

"That will do very well. You will see that the old man is comfortable. And in the mean-

time I want you to take him out now, and show him some of the sights of London—take him to see Buckingham Palace, and the Houses of Parliament, and the Horse Guards, and so on. And first of all you must persuade him to go somewhere and have some dinner; he has had nothing since early morning; be sure he has a good dinner; and when he comes back in the evening he must have some tea in his own room; and perhaps I may come round for a moment to see how he is getting on.”

She took a sovereign from her purse.

“Mind you make him cheerful and comfortable, and talk to him, and get everything he needs. Is there any Highland whiskey to be got in London refreshment-rooms?”

“They says so, Miss,” the coachman answered, with grave caution.

“You must see what he would like with his dinner. His name is Mr. Logan. You must call him ‘Mr.’ Now I will give him over into your hands; and I hope to hear at night that he has spent a very pleasant afternoon.”

And, strangely enough, this mere girl had hit upon the right way of going about this thing. Old John Logan, during the two or three days he spent in London, got to be con-

vinced that he had nothing to fear—that no one wanted to harm him—that he was a free man—that the young lady's forgiveness of him was all-sufficient. For one thing, Miss Ramsden took very good care not to say anything of what she had done or was doing to Mr. Holt. She had heard of such a phrase as "compounding a felony;" and while she felt in her heart that she was justified in assuring this old man that he had suffered enough and made ample expiation, she did not quite know how her conduct might strike a legal or commercial mind. She thought she would tell Mr. Holt all about it—after John Logan had gone home.

In the meantime, the old man's gratitude towards her was something extraordinary to witness. It was like the dumb gratitude of a dog, for he could not say much of what he felt. And when she showed him the pretty bits of finery that she had bought for his granddaughter, and that were to help to deck out the bride, tears rose to the old man's eyes, and he said—

"If you had the Gaelic, Mem, I could tell you what I wass thinking of you, Mem, and—and your kindness—but I will never be able to tell you that."

His last speech to her, when the time came for his bidding her farewell, was of the same apologetic nature. She did not go down to the St. Katherine's Docks with him; but she put him in safe hands; and Mr. Holt, at her intercession, had made arrangements with one of the sub-officers on board the Anchor Liner, by which the old man would be taken care of if he had any time to wait in Greenock for the Dunara Castle. John Logan, as he was being driven down to St. Katherine's Docks in a four-wheeled cab, saw, amongst the other things they passed, the Tower of London; and he beheld it without a qualm; the gentle-voiced young lady had successfully banished all his fears.

But what was he to say to the people when, after the long, and, as it chanced, uneventful voyage, he got back to Harivaig again—as one returned from the dead? Well; he said nothing at all. If anyone asked him, he answered that he had been away to the south, and had seen many strange sights. But when Jeannie Logan, in mingled shyness and pride, began to show to her intimate friends the beautiful things that the English young lady had sent her for her wedding-day, then the bruit got abroad that old John Logan was so

insensately fond of his spoiled granddaughter that he had gone all the way to London to purchase adornments for her. Jeannie protested against this misapprehension, and even showed them the very grateful letter she was going to send to Miss Ramsden; but all was of no use.

Moreover, they made still another mistake when the wedding-day came round. The marriage took place in the inn, as the custom holds in those parts; and in the evening all the people—some of them very remote kinsfolk, who had come from long distances—assembled at supper. It was a protracted feast; and there was a mighty babblement of laughter, and talking, and joking, to say nothing of the piper up at the fireplace end of the room, who was screaming away with “Hoop her and gird her” and “Follow her over the border;” so that, towards the end of the banquet, it was with difficulty the roaring guests could be got to understand that old John Logan—old John Logan, of all people in the world—was going to propose a health, with Highland honours too. Perhaps it was the excitement of the moment, perhaps it was an extra drop of Glendarroch that had put the idea into the old

man's head; however, there was silence when he mounted on his chair, and raised his glass in his trembling hand.

"We are all friends here," said he, in the Gaelic, "and I ask all friends of me and mine to drink this: Blessings on her—and a hundred thousand blessings!—and long life and happiness to the *Roa-nam-bân!*" *

He put his right foot on the table.

"*Nish—nish! Suasa—suasa!*" † he called; and therewith he tossed off the whiskey, and dashed the glass down to the floor, so that it should never be drunk out of again.

"*Roa-nam-bân!—Roa-nam-bân!*" they cried; but they were all laughing at him; they thought it was a foolish thing for the infatuated old man to call his granddaughter the best of women, even on her wedding-day. For not one of them (except, perhaps, the granddaughter herself—who was not offended) guessed who it was whom old John Logan had in his mind, when he called on his friends to drink long life and happiness to the *Roa-nam-bân*.

* Properly, *Rogha-nam-ban*.—The best, the choicest among women.

† *Nish—nish! Suasa—suasa!*—Now—now! Up with it—up with it!

ROMEO AND JULIET:

A TALE OF TWO YOUNG FOOLS.



CHAPTER I.

“MY UNFORTUNATE CLIENT.”

“God bless my soul, one might as well try to find one’s way in a rabbit-burrow !”

The tall and elderly gentleman who was thus angrily muttering to himself in the dim corridors of the Law Courts was rather a good-looking person, with well-cut features, a white moustache, and steel-grey eyes, but with some ominously ill-tempered lines where the eyebrows met. And if this search of his for Appeal Court No. 1 seemed a perfectly hopeless thing, it was to be attributed rather to his own impatience than to any negligence on the part of the officials. He would not wait for explanations ; after each brief direction, off he would

set once more ; occasionally getting "warm," as the children say, and then again finding on the wall some bewildering instructions to ~~to~~ witnesses. At last, however, he ran full tilt against his own solicitor.

"Good morning, Lord Amesleigh," said this latter, who had little of the ordinary ferret-look of a solicitor, but was rather portly, and bland, and suave. "Come to hear the appeal argued?"

"I am come to hear the appeal ; but what there is to argue about I cannot for the life of me imagine," said the elderly gentleman, with some petulance. "Why, every man-jack of a lawyer I have put the case before has told me that it is as clear as daylight—that the other side haven't the ghost of a leg to stand on. Indeed, their unanimity has been rather suspicious, to tell you the truth. And when I have said to them, 'Well, but if I am so obviously in the right, why did —— decide against me?' then the invariable answer has been, 'Oh, —— is an old fool. You're quite sure to win now. If —— had decided in your favour, you might have had cause for alarm. All his decisions are reversed on appeal.' Well, now, that is a nice kind of person to have on the Bench !"

The solicitor, even in talking to an injured client, was bound to maintain the dignity of the law.

"It was simply a misfortune that he should have tried the case," said he; "for that is not the kind of thing he is familiar with. It was transferred to the Queen's Bench Division quite unexpectedly; and then our leading counsel was a Chancery barrister; and his junior—well——"

"Where is this infernal Court?" said his lordship, with a touch of impatience; he had heard these explanations before.

The bland Mr. Bannersby forthwith conducted his client into the hushed Court, where there was the usual motley little crowd of hangers-on seated at haphazard among young barristers in wig and gown, with three old gentlemen, also in wig and gown, on a raised bench. One of those young barristers, puffy, with spectacles, was declaiming away with emphatic voice and uplifted arm, as if he were addressing a more than ordinarily vacuous jury; but the three old gentlemen didn't seem to mind: one was looking at a book, another turning over some papers, and he in the middle appeared to have found a hair in the point of his pen.

H

"Does that fool of a fellow," said Lord Amesleigh, looking peevishly at the haranguing barrister, "does he think that judges are to be impressed by pot-house eloquence?"

"It's a way some of them get into," the solicitor said, in an apologetic tone.

"He talks as if he were going on till Doomsday. When does our case come on?"

"It is the next on the list; and I should think this one will be over shortly. Won't you take a seat, Lord Amesleigh? There may be some little delay, you know."

His lordship was just about to pass round to secure a place on one of the benches, when there entered by the opposite door, and accompanied by two friends, a lady of somewhat distinguished presence, and dressed in the extreme of fashion. She was probably about five-and-forty; handsome in a way; and with an air that seemed to say that she was extremely well able to take care of herself. Now, whether this Mrs. Laxbourne, having driven into the city to ask her lawyers how the appeal was likely to go, had been induced to look into the Court for a moment as a mere matter of curiosity, or whether she had come to hear the case outright, Lord Amesleigh did not stay to

inquire. The instant he caught a glimpse of her, he said to his solicitor—

"The mere sight of that poisonous witch sickens me. I'm off. Will you send me word as soon as the decision is known? I shall be at the Carlton."

"Yes, certainly," Mr. Bannersby made answer. I will send along one of my clerks as soon as judgment is given."

"Very well," said Lord Amesleigh, and he at once left the Court by the door opposite to that by which Mrs. Laxbourne had entered.

It was not, however, till well past midday that the messenger arrived at the Carlton Club. Lord Amesleigh came to see him in the hall; and there was a look of severe scrutiny in his lordship's face that the young man did not at all like.

"I am very sorry, my lord——" he stammered.

"But what is it? What is the result? Let's hear at once."

The young man hesitated, and there was a kind of beseeching look in his eyes.

"I am very sorry, my lord—but—but the appeal has been dismissed—and with costs."

"Dismissed? With costs?" his lordship

repeated, and at first he seemed too bewildered to be angry or indignant. "What do they mean? God bless my soul and body, what do they mean! There is the plain covenant. How can they get over it? This woman buys the piece of ground on the distinct undertaking neither to build nor otherwise to do anything to injure my house. There it is. The other side admit it. What can be clearer?"

"Yes, my lord," said the messenger, rather timidly. "But their lordships construed the clause to mean that she was not to build to the injury of your house——"

"Then I wish to heavens there was an institution in this country for teaching our judges the meaning of plain English. And I suppose I am to shut up that window now?"

"No, my lord," said the clerk, with a little relief; "on that point we win. They give three guineas damages against Mrs. Laxbourne for having blocked up the window."

"Upon my word, this is too bewildering!" was the involuntary exclamation. "There is the point on which the whole dispute turned. It is decided in my favour, and yet I am cast in the costs of the whole case! Such a muddle was never heard of on the face of the earth

before ! The Chancery Court grant an injunction, and the hoarding the woman had the impudence to put up is taken away ; then the case comes on, but it isn't tried in Chancery, it is tried in the Queen's Bench Division before a judge who knows nothing about the matter ; then it comes to the Court of Appeal, and their lordships decide that I am entitled to the freedom of my window—and to three guineas damages—and yet the judgment is against me, and the costs of both sides ! Why, the law is a fool !”

“Not half such a fool as those who have recourse to it,” the young man, having experience, may have thought ; but of course such things are not said to clients.

“Can you give me an idea of what the total costs will amount to ?” Lord Amesleigh demanded, abruptly.

“I am sorry I can't, my lord——”

“Tell Mr. Bannersby to make as accurate an estimate as he can, and send it to me at once. Good afternoon !”

So the messenger was dismissed ; and the angry and disappointed litigant remained in the hall of the club, pacing up and down, with his lips firm and his eyes scowling, and with but the curtest nod for any acquaintance who chanced to pass.

CHAPTER II.

JIMMIE.

ON this same wintry afternoon, Kensington Gardens presented a rather melancholy appearance. The copper-hued sun was setting behind the tall and leafless trees; a thin mist prevailed everywhere; the Round Pond was slightly frozen over, and powdered with snow; a sprinkling of snow, too, lay here and there on the ruddy pathways and the dark green grass. There were few people about; the human life of the place had been drawn to the northern side of the pond, where some lads and boys had started a slide, and were busy with the roaring game. Any passer-by going east or west walked quickly because of the cold, and soon disappeared in the dusky twilight that hung about those solitary avenues.

On the southern side of the pond, however, there were two young people standing, face to face, and evidently far too much engrossed with their own affairs to heed what was happening around them. The young lady was slight, and rather small of figure, with an oval face, pale

complexion, rufous hair neatly braided, and round blue eyes. Of course her eyes were no rounder than any one else's eyes, but they looked rounder somehow, and they were very innocent, and appealing, and gentle. She was smartly dressed in a Newmarket coat of some dark green stuff, with a tiny bonnet of the same material, and she wore a boa round her neck, as became the time and the fashion; her hands were hidden in a muff; and altogether she looked very pretty, and neat, and warm, and comfortable. Her companion, a young fellow of two or three-and-twenty, was considerably taller than she, sufficiently pleasant-looking, pale of complexion, like herself, and of slim, but well-built frame.

"Twenty-times worse than ever, that's what I call it," he was saying ruefully. "And what the meaning of it all is I can't imagine. When you go to law of course you expect one side to win. I cared very little which won, except in this way, that your mother could much better afford to pay the costs than my father can. It would have been a small matter to her, but it won't be to my father, with every penny locked up in these wretched companies. But, as I say, of course I expected one side

would win, and I thought the winner might be satisfied with the triumph, and come forward and do the generous thing, don't you know. But now, according to this ridiculous judgment, both sides lose! Your mother is not allowed to block up our window, but she may go on with that confounded greenhouse——”

“And why confounded greenhouse?” the young lady said, promptly. “I might just as well talk of your confounded window.”

“The law says we were quite justified in making that window,” he retorted.

“And the law says we shall be justified in going on with the greenhouse,” she maintained.

“But you know perfectly well the window would never have been made if you had not claimed the right to build anything you liked on that piece of land. You know that quite well. It was the greenhouse began it.”

“Don't quarrel with me, Percy!” she said, with a sudden change of front.

“Yes, that's what you always say when you're beaten in argument; and then I have to give in!”

“And so you ought,” she said, rather saucily. “Just think how good I am to you. Look at me now, standing shivering in the cold——”

"Shivering, indeed! You're as warm as an apple-pie — and as sweet. But look here, Jimmie," said he (for this was his poetical way of contracting the name Jemima), "what's to be done now?"

"I don't know," said she. "It's for you to find out if anything can be done. And mind, Percy, I can't keep on meeting you like this — at least, it can't be often. Supposing we were caught, and the story carried to mamma?"

"Oh," said he, carelessly, "they have themselves to blame. If Montague and Capulet choose to quarrel, they must take the consequences."

"Yes," she said, "but if one of the consequences should be that mamma were to suddenly whisk me off to Nice or Cannes, then it's very little of your Jimmie you'd see for many and many a day."

"It's a horrible thing to have no position or profession, and to be entirely dependent," said he, bewailing his hard lot. "That comes of being a second son. My brother Charlie had everything done for him that my father's crippled finances would allow, and now that he's been ordered out to the Soudan, he has a chance of showing what stuff is in him. But

what are you to do if you're only a private secretary? A private secretary to a Minister is all right; he is generally provided for sooner or later; but if you're only private secretary to your own father, and working away at prospectuses and companies that never produce anything but squabbles at the board meetings, then it's rather dismal."

"Well, I must be going, Percy," Miss Laxbourne said.

"Oh, no, wait a minute! When shall I see you next? I must think over the whole situation, and find out if there's nothing to be done."

"And soon, Percy! For you know mamma's way; at any moment she may take it into her head to be off to the south; and then we should have forty-eight hours' notice. If this cold weather continues, she is just as likely as not to do that."

"Yes, I will try to devise something, though it seems pretty hopeless. When shall I see you again, then? Are you going to Mrs. Meyer's crush to-night?"

"Oh, are you?"

"If I thought you would be there, yes. But I shouldn't care to hang about the place—

jammed in a crowd—having to take some old woman down to supper, and all the rest, unless I knew you were coming.”

“Well, I couldn’t be certain,” his companion said, “for you know mamma never decides till the last minute, and to-night we are going to the theatre. If you could be at the theatre, then I could signal to you for certain.”

“What theatre?”

“The Lyceum. We are going to see Miss Anderson’s *Parthenia*.”

“I couldn’t get a place!” said he.

“Surely they would give you a chair at the end of the stalls—opposite our box, I mean.”

“And how are you to signal to me?” said he, for he was not aware of all the wiles of this artful young woman.

“Oh, that’s easy enough.”

She gave him her muff to hold, and then removed the furred glove from her right hand. It was a very pretty, white, small, warm hand, and on the third finger there was a hoop of rubies and diamonds.

“If Uncle James only knew I was using the ring he gave me to make clandestine appointments——”

“Clandestine stuff! It’s their own fault.”

“Whose fault?”

“Oh, everybody’s,” said he, anxious not to offend.

“Well, you know,” said she, “as soon as I see you, I will put my hand on the edge of the box; and if the ring is on the small finger—so—that means, ‘*All right: we’re going to Mrs. Meyer’s.*’ But if it’s a little way on the forefinger, that means ‘*I’m awfully sorry: mamma won’t go.*’ Now do you understand?” she asked, and she put back the ring in its accustomed place.

“But if it is where it is now, what message will that be.”

“Let me see. That will be ‘*I love you,*’” she said, rather coyly.

“Is that why you keep it there always?”

“It is very, very rude to ask questions—don’t you know that? Now say good-bye, and let me go.”

“‘Parting is such sweet sorrow, that I shall say good-bye till it be morrow.’”

“But that’s mine,” she said, instantly; and it is to be suspected that they had rehearsed that scene before.

“Oh, no, it isn’t,” he answered. “Wait a minute, I’ve something to tell you.”

(Indeed it mattered little what he had to tell

her, so long as he could get her to remain there, with her pretty oval chin resting on the boa, and her blue eyes smiling attention.)

"I had to run down to Curwen on business last week," he continued, "and you know the old Hall is in rather a musty condition—it's ever so much more cheerful at the Blue Lion, and I generally put up there. But this time they had made some little preparations at the Hall, and besides Polly Parker was away——"

"And who is Polly Parker?" said Miss Laxbourne, with a sudden coldness.

"She's the daughter of the landlord, and a very lively young person she is."

"I was not aware that you cared for the society of publicans' daughters."

"Well, it's a very curious thing, you know," said he, "but it's a fact all the same, that sometimes publicans' daughters are just as pretty as other people's daughters. Oh, don't you get savage for nothing—I was talking about people generally. Of course, I did not mean to compare her with you."

"Thank you," said Miss Laxbourne, rather stiffly, "but I am not in the habit of getting savage. And I do not wish to be compared with any one, if you please."

Then something happened which need not be described here. It was a private matter. He continued his tale.

“And just as I was going to tell you how I was thinking about you all the time, you ungrateful creature! There was I in a great dusky room, with tapestry on the walls. And if there’s anything in the world I hate, it’s tapestry, if you’re sitting alone; for whenever you turn there’s a big fat ghost glaring at you. Well, I said to myself, I would go and get *Romeo and Juliet*, and read all your speeches, as gently as ever I could, and then answer them. I took a candle and went into the library——”

“Is it a ghost story, Percy?”

“It’s no story at all, you goose. The only ‘Shakespeare’ I could find was a lithographic *fac-simile* of the first folio; and I thought that would do well enough; and took it back with me. But when I came to read your speeches, and then mine, I made a discovery—at least, I suppose it would be no discovery to the literary swells, but it was to me. You never saw such a hashing up of a text in all your born days. It is Romeo who says ‘Parting is such sweet sorrow’—so you see I can claim that if I like.

Then Juliet says, 'Sleep dwell upon thine eyes, peace in thy breast'—so you can steal that from me if you choose; but I know Shakespeare meant it to be mine. Then Romeo goes on: 'The grey-eyed morn smiles on the frowning night,' and so forth, which clearly belongs to the Friar, and is repeated further down the page. And then I began to think: if these two actor fellows, Hemminge and Condell, flung Shakespeare's plays together in this way, what's the good of the literary swells swearing by the sacred text of Shakespeare, and quarrelling about the spelling of a single word? Why, you never saw such spelling and such blunders, on every page. My private opinion is that those two fellows were a couple of unmitigated frauds—and that nobody has the least notion how Shakespeare left his plays——"

"Yes, dear; but really I must go," said Miss Laxbourne. The truth was that the two actors who, as editors, made their bow to the public in the first quarter of the seventeenth century, were exceedingly interesting to him for the simple reason that they served to keep the small green-clad figure there in front of him; but they were less interesting to her, who knew that her mamma might make inquiries as to her absence.

"At all events you must let me go as far as Church Street with you."

"Not into the thoroughfare."

"Very well."

So together they walked westward, and crossed Kensington Palace Gardens, and went along the stone passage. At the corner she stopped for a moment, and gave him her hand.

"You've mixed up all those speeches now, Percy, and I don't know what to say."

"Oh, yes, you do—never mind whether it is in Shakespeare or not. You know well enough."

"But I can't be saying *that* to you always. Perhaps—if I think you're looking very nice—I may say it by my ring to-night when you come into the stalls."

And before he could remonstrate she was away—making for Campden Hill and home.

CHAPTER III.

WHITE LIES.

MR. MEYER was a gentleman with rather a nasal nose; he was a well-known financier; a grower of orchids; a giver of good dinners;

and a lavish patron of the arts. His wife belonged to an old historical English family, now of faded fortunes ; and being a woman of shrewdness, dexterity, and wit, to say nothing of her personal charms, which were considerable, she had formed around her a very pleasant circle of friends and acquaintances, who, on their part, found her house a desirable haven. She was exceedingly kind to Mr. Percy Blount, because, as she said, "he was such a pretty boy ;" but his father, Lord Amesleigh, would not accept any of her invitations, no doubt dreading to meet his arch-enemy, Mrs. Laxbourne, under Mrs. Meyer's hospitable roof.

Now the welcome message had been flashed from the hoop of rubies and diamonds ; and as soon as the play was over, the young gentleman who had been lingering at the end of the stalls made his way out, leisurely got into a cab, and was driven to Lancaster Gate. Leisurely, because he wished to give Mrs. Laxbourne and her daughter time to get there first, for reasons he had.

When he went upstairs to the landing, and was received by his smiling hostess, she said,

"Mima is here."

"I know."

"After this quarrelling, I suppose you had better not let the mamma see you?"

"I suppose not."

"But, if you like, I will go and get Mima to come and talk to me here," was the next good-natured suggestion.

"Will you?" said he; but his eyes conveyed more than his words.

Mrs. Meyer disappeared into the dense throng within the rooms—there was music going on, and also a good deal of talking in corners—and presently emerged again, followed by the anxious-eyed Miss Laxbourne.

"Oh, Percy," said the young lady (and this was the way she entered into conversation with Mrs. Meyer, who, good woman, paid no further heed to her, but left her to her own devices), "I am so glad you have come! I have been so miserable. I don't know how I was able to make light of all this trouble when I saw you in the afternoon. It seems quite hopeless now. You should hear how mamma goes on. All the evening—in the theatre—I was wishing I had never, never seen you, nor you me."

"Come in here," he said, and he touched her arm, and she followed him a little way into a side-room, where there was an improvised *buffet*.

There was no one in the place except a couple of servants, who were behind the long tables, and could not possibly make much out of the undertones of these young folk.

"It isn't so bad as that, Jimmie," said he. "Don't you get into a fright. Of course, it is pretty awkward, I admit. So far we've only been playing at Romeo and Juliet; but it looks a little more serious now. However, keep up your spirits, Jim!"

"But what's to be done, Percy?" she said, with pleading eyes.

"Well, I've been thinking, though I'm not good at it. I'm an ass, I know; but that's the first step towards wisdom, to know you are an ass. I've been thinking, Jimmie; and the only thing to be done is to tell a lot of white lies."

"Who, dear?"

"You and I."

"Then they'll have to be awfully white ones that I have to tell, or else you'll never believe me afterwards."

"Oh, you can put them all on to me. A husband is responsible for his wife's debts—and stratagems."

"That's looking a long way ahead, Percy."

"Oh, no, it isn't. I consider that is our relationship now. Why, what difference does the marriage ceremony make? What is the difference between you as you go into the church, to hear some words mumbled, and you when you come out again and walk down to the carriage?"

"The difference?" she said; and her eyes grew grave—which always meant mischief. "The difference, I suppose, is that before you are married young gentlemen are inclined to be civil to you, and that afterwards they don't care anything more about you."

"That's all you know, then," he said, triumphantly. "That's your infantile innocence and ignorance. It's only after a woman does get married that she has a 'real good time' with the young fellows—and old fellows, too; for they're not afraid of her any longer."

"Are you afraid of me, Percy?"

"Oh, I consider I'm as good as married already. I'm in for it. I've done it."

"You needn't talk about it like that, anyway," said she, pulling up her head a little bit.

At this moment the pretty Mrs. Meyer came into the room.

"Ah, you two sketching again?" she said,

making use of a phrase the meaning of which is well understood in certain houses in London.

"Oh, no," Percy Blount said; "only putting in a few rough outlines."

"I'm afraid you'll have to come back to your mamma, Mima," said the young matron. "I don't want to get into trouble."

"Just a minute! A couple of minutes," the young man pleaded; and Mrs. Meyer good-naturedly laughed and withdrew.

"This is my plan, Jimmie. You know what an importance people put on the words 'I'm sorry,' if only the other side will say them. They will hold on to a quarrel, and fight it through thick and thin, and spend hundreds and thousands of pounds on it; but if only their enemy will say, 'I am sorry'—whew! it's all over. Now you've got to persuade your mother that my father is sorry, and I've got to persuade my father that your mother is sorry."

"But how, Percy?"

"By inventing a number of little expressions of regret—pity the thing ever went to law—your mother says she never would have blocked up the window if she had known we were entitled to it—my father says he never would have objected to the greenhouse if he had only

been told beforehand—more regret that the thing ever went to law: don't you understand? Why, each will think the other confesses to having been wrong; and you can't help forgiving anybody who says, 'I'm sorry;' and then all that is wanted is for Mrs. Meyer to ask them both to dinner. And she'll do that for me—she'll do anything for me——”

“Because she is married; and you are one of the young gentlemen who are not afraid of her?” Miss Laxbourne asked, in innocent pursuit of knowledge.

“Don't be saucy. Now listen. I will do all the lying, and cheerfully——”

“Oh, indeed!”

“Haven't I to save your conscience, you tender young thing? And it will be quite easy for you. All you will have to do will be from time to time to say 'Mamma, I hear Lord Amesleigh is awfully sorry he ever tried to stop your building the greenhouse, and says it was all a misunderstanding;' or, 'Mamma, I hear Lord Amesleigh says he would never have made that window if he had thought it would annoy you,' and so on. You're not telling any lie; you did hear these things—from me.”

“But if they're not true, Percy?”

“What’s that to you? That’s my business. You see, the law distinctly tells you that the husband is answerable for his wife’s debts—and devices; but that the wife isn’t answerable for the husband’s: at least, I think that is the law; but as the lawyers themselves don’t seem to know what the law is, I won’t be sure. However, there it is; I take it on me. And then it is all in the interests of peace and goodwill. There’s lying and lying. When I was a small boy at school, the fellows would come to me and say, ‘Look here, Blount, Fred Hogan says, for all you’re an Honourable, he can knock your head off.’ I knew Hogan never said anything of the kind; but what could I do? Then they’d go to Hogan. ‘Look here, Hogan, Blount says he can kick you into the middle of next week.’ The result of that kind of lying was war—bloody war, indeed; but the result of this kind of lying can only be peace. Now are you satisfied?”

“I hope it will all turn out right,” Miss Laxbourne said, with a bit of a sigh.

“Don’t you see, Jimmie, when Mrs. Meyer brings them together it will be a case of letting bygones be bygones. They will each think the other has been penitential, and it would be most

rude and unforgiving to reopen so painful a subject. That is the sensible way of settling the whole affair—instead of shutting up a poor young lady in a charnel-house and murdering people all over the place. So I'll tell you how to begin—cautiously, cautiously, mind——”

Here Mrs. Meyer appeared again, laughing, but with a distinct warning.

“I really must go, dear,” the young lady said; and then she looked at him with solemn eyes. “And isn't it too bad of Mrs. Meyer to say we're sketching? It's far more serious than that, isn't it, Percy?”

“Why, of course it is!” said he. “Sketching is only skylarking.”

And with this recondite aphorism implanted in her tender bosom, Miss Laxbourne returned to the moving and murmuring throng.

CHAPTER IV.

THE GO-BETWEENS.

BUT it was a desperately difficult task these two had undertaken; for Mrs. Laxbourne was furious, and Lord Amesleigh more than furious.

Even Mrs. Meyer, who had been mainly instrumental in bringing the young people together, and who was good-naturedly looking forward to the possibility of pacification after the ill-will begotten of the lawsuit had calmed down somewhat, did not dream of interfering thus prematurely.

"Of course it will come right in the end," she said to her husband. "It must. There never was a more eligible match. Look at it. You have a young fellow of good family who hasn't a penny in the world, and his father unable to do anything for him; and you have the only daughter—the only child, indeed—of a rich widow; and these two are head-over-ears in love with each other. What more can you want? It must come right, if the father and the mother have any reason left. If it doesn't, they should be shut up in Bedlam."

Mrs. Meyer's husband had less enthusiasm, perhaps less interest—he was a busy man.

"It ought to come all right, as you call it, if they have any common sense," he said, rather indifferently. "But it is wonderful how some people love a quarrel—how they will hug it and cherish it, as if it was a lap-dog—especially a quarrel that has got into the law-courts."

However, if you are so anxious to have the affair made up, why don't you send Mima to the old gentleman? She should go down on her knees, shouldn't she?—that's the way they do on the stage. And she has eyes pretty enough for anything; only pretty eyes don't count for much when you are over sixty and ill-tempered."

In the mean time the young lady with the pretty eyes was confiding her fears, and sorrows, and timid despairs to Percy Blount. They had met once more in Kensington Gardens, and were walking up and down over the thin sprinkling of snow, and pretending to watch the unusual scamperings of a big collie, that skated a good deal as it went headlong across the ice of the Round Pond after a ball thrown by its master.

"If there was only ground glass in that window," she said, piteously, "mamma might more easily be reconciled to it."

"Ground glass! what does that matter?" he said. "I suppose your mother is going to build that greenhouse so that my father may have the pleasure of seeing it every time he goes out of the door?"

"What is the use of a greenhouse if people

can look into it from an opposite window?" said she.

He stepped back a pace.

"Well, you are a pretty innocent, you are! That's a very nice speech for such a dear, tender, young thing to make! 'What's the use of a greenhouse if people can look into it?' Then the real use is to be a nice quiet corner when the others are busy with music or afternoon tea? Oh, yes, Miss Slyboots——"

"Percy, why will you put meanings into everything I say?"

"The proper uses of a greenhouse!—why you should be made President of a Sketching Society."

"I never did a bit of sketching—never, never!" she said. "It was all real—from the first moment I saw you; and you've no right to say such things of me!"

"You never did a bit of sketching? How about the Hudspeths' ball, and that white-faced, yellow-moustached, lisping idiot from Oxford?"

"Well, you were very ill-natured to me that evening, and it served you right," said Miss Jimmie.

"And that artist-fellow who wrote the verses about you in the *South Kensington Magazine*?"

"If people choose to write verses, how can I help it? Percy, why will you quarrel? Why don't you be kind to me, when I take so much trouble to come and see you?"

"Well, I suppose I'm always in the wrong," he said, with admirable good-humour.

"Ah, now I see you are going to be different," said Miss Jimmie, approvingly. "I can always tell by your eyes. It's when you try to trap me that you're so unkind. It's when you try to be clever; and what's the use of that, Percy, when you are not clever? I mean not *very*, *very* clever. It's far easier for you, and I'm sure it's far pleasanter for me, for you to be just good and nice."

"My dear," said he, "on the raging prairies I've often seen men shot for saying far less than what you've just said to me; but I forgive you; for you're such a simple young thing; and you never sketch; and you never gave any lilies of the valley to Major Macdonald when he asked you for them at the carriage-door; and you never stopped on board the Lamberts' boat at Henley, along with Sidney Weigall, when I had promised the Greys that you and your mother were coming to lunch with them. But it is no use beginning a catalogue of your iniquities——"

"It's all very fine for you to say that," she said, sharply. "You — who are the most abominable flirt I ever saw in my life!"

"Tell me what you have said to your mother," he said, with some prudence; and instantly her manner changed; for this was recalling her from these sham quarrels to the serious realities of their position.

"Well, Percy, I haven't done much good so far," she said. "Of course, mamma knows that I have seen you. And you told me I should be justified in saying to her that your father bitterly regretted having gone to law."

"Justified! I should think so: you never said a truer word in your life," he interposed, rather grimly. "The estimated costs five hundred pounds; that means six hundred to pay. Of course your mother would think little of that; but it's serious for us. Well, did she say anything?"

"She said, 'No doubt he does, and serve him right,'" answered Miss Jimmie, honestly.

"That can hardly be called promising for a beginning," Mr. Percy said, "but my scheme is young yet. Well, did you say anything more?"

"No; I didn't dare. For do you know what

frightens me, Percy? Mamma has taken this quarrel so much to heart that I am sure, if she thought I sympathised with your side, she would forbid me ever to see you, or to speak to you again. Mind you, I think it is awfully good of her that she hasn't said so already; for she must know that you and I meet occasionally, at Mrs. Meyer's and elsewhere; though she doesn't know the meaning of the postage-stamp on the pane. Well, I say it is all the fault of the lawyers that we should have to meet in this hole-and-corner way; fancy their dawdling over that case for a whole eight months, and then making a hash of it in the end. And now I am quite afraid to speak of it to mamma, in case she should say, 'I forbid you to have any further communication with Mr. Blount.'"

"But what would that matter?"

"It would matter everything," said she, rather pensively.

"You don't mean to say you would give me up just because of a freak of your mother's?" he demanded, with indignant eyes.

"If it was her wish, she would make me," said Miss Jimmie, sadly. "It's little you know how a girl is situated."

"Now, don't you be an ass, Jimmie," he

exclaimed. "Do you mean to say you would like to play *Romeo and Juliet* in earnest? Do you mean to say you would allow your mother to take you away, and shut you up, and stuff of that kind? That is all very well in plays, but doesn't belong to the nineteenth century at all."

"I don't look at it that way, Percy, when I am with you. That is just where it is. When I am with you, I feel sure everything will be right."

"And everything will be right," said he, in a comforting fashion. "All we have to do is to treat those two pugilistic people with a little judicious skill."

So they parted at that time. But, to do the young man justice, it was with a good deal more than a little judicious skill that he proceeded to work out his scheme. The difficulties were all at the beginning. It was with impatient anger that Lord Amesleigh received Mrs. Laxbourne's admission—as gently conveyed by his son Percy—that she wished there had been no lawsuit. A similar admission on the part of Lord Amesleigh—conveyed by Miss Laxbourne—was received by Mrs. Laxbourne in sullen silence. These were but initial steps,

however. Whenever either of the elder people could be got to talk on the subject, there was sure to be some phrase used which, with a little useful colouring, could be made presentable to the other side. Moreover, a man likes to be told that he has been right in a quarrel; and if he thinks that a little generosity on his part will secure for him that grateful assurance, he will hardly begrudge it.

"It isn't half so easy to make people friends as to make them enemies," said Percy Blount to his timid fellow-conspirator. "But we're getting on. And now you can tell your mother that my father as good as says that if he had known the window would be such an annoyance he never would have had it made."

"But did he say so, Percy?"

"Well—you—see—in fact—I don't know that he used these exact words—not these precise words, perhaps—but you give the general effect, don't you know? And after that your mother ought to say something handsome about the greenhouse."

"She has never said a word about building it, Percy."

"Perhaps she won't build?" he said, eagerly.

"Perhaps not."

"Then I may tell my father that your mother won't build the greenhouse after all?"

"Well, I wouldn't say that, Percy—I wouldn't say that precisely—not *precisely*."

"Oh, I tell you we are getting on first-rate!" said he, with the greatest confidence.

Indeed, matters went on very well; and in due time it was mutually understood that both parties were very sorry the lawsuit had ever been entered upon; and that each was free to admit that the other had a good deal of right on his and her side. No doubt the well-known attachment of the young people helped towards this desirable consummation; Lord Amesleigh being quite aware that a marriage with Miss Laxbourne would be a most excellent thing for his younger son; and Mrs. Laxbourne being ready to acknowledge that Mr. Percy Blount was a very pleasant-mannered young man.

This was the situation of affairs when one morning Mrs. Laxbourne and her daughter, having been shopping down in Kensington High Street, were returning home by Campden Hill Road.

"Mamma," said the daughter, in a breathless undertone, "here is Lord Amesleigh coming along!"

"Well?" was the only and rather chilling answer.

"But you'll bow to him, won't you?—oh, yes!—he has been so civil and anxious to make everything up."

She could not say any more because of Lord Amesleigh's approach. It was clear that the two enemies distrusted each other. He regarded her rather distantly; she pretended not to know of his coming. And then, when he was quite near, she raised her eyes—ready to whip them away if he was not expecting recognition; the next moment he was raising his hat; Mrs. Laxbourne bowed; and poor little Jimmie bowed too, and then the widow sailed majestically on.

"You're such a dear mother!" the girl said, and she clung to her arm; but Mrs. Laxbourne did not smile, nor look pleased, nor fluttered; what she had done had been demanded of her by the merest forms of courtesy.

Arrived within doors, Miss Jimmie, her heart bubbling over with joy, immediately ran to her own room; and there and quickly did she take out a postage-stamp and press it to her lips—happy postage-stamp!—and put it on the upper corner of the lower sash of the window. From

the outside that postage-stamp, to any one who chanced to see it, would have appeared an insignificant speck; but if Percy Blount happened to be coming by that way—which was highly probable, seeing that he lived next door—he would recognize its importance. For Miss Jimmie, driven by the hard necessities of fate, had become skilled in the use of telegraphic signals; and the postage-stamp on the window-pane meant nothing less than “*Dear Percy, be sure to meet me at the Round Pond at four o'clock this afternoon.*”

And at four o'clock that afternoon there he was.

“Oh, Percy, I have such good news!” she cried.

“I thought you had, by the way you came along—with a step as light as a fairy. We'll have to enter you for a walking-match at Lillie Bridge. What is it?”

“Mamma and I met your father this morning; and she bowed to him, and he bowed to her!”

“You don't mean that!”

“Yes, I do.”

“We've done it—and I told you we should,” he said, rather patronisingly.

"Well, Percy, I will beg your pardon ; I did not think you were so clever—and everything has turned out exactly as you said."

"What's the next thing to be done?" said he. "I've heard of chemical experiments in which you place two substances together and let them melt separately, and they'll keep separate, too, so long as they are motionless, but the moment you jog the dish they rush together. Who's going to jog the dish?"

"I don't know what you mean, Percy."

"Have you time to come with me to Mrs. Meyer's?"

"What, now?"

"Yes, this instant."

"No ; I must go back home at once. Besides, how could you and I go together to Mrs. Meyer's? Even if we were engaged, I shouldn't much like it."

"Oh, we are not engaged then?" said he.

"A proper engagement is when the parents know," said the young lady.

"But if parents will go to law for eight months, things will happen in the mean time independently of them, don't you see? Well, I will go on to Mrs. Meyer's by myself."

"What for, Percy?"

"Never you mind," said the arch-plotter. "Something strange will happen ere long, as Zadkiel says."

After a few minutes' further talk, immaterial to this narrative, they parted, and he made straight away northward for Lancaster Gate. There were a number of people in Mrs. Meyer's drawing-room, and he was furnished with some tea and an elderly lady to entertain. But by-and-by Mrs. Meyer, finding an opportunity, took him a little bit aside.

"What is it you want?" she said, laughing. "It wasn't for tea and talk you came here this afternoon. Cigarettes and billiards, I imagine, are what you fill up your leisure time with—unless when you're skirmishing around with Mima Laxbourne. What is it?"

"I want you to ask my father and Mrs. Laxbourne to dinner on the same night," said he.

"What?" she cried. "Do you think I want the chandeliers smashed?"

"I assure you they will meet most peaceably—in the most friendly way," he said.

It will be remembered that when Barbara Allan went to visit Sir John Graham of the West Countrie the remark she made—and it

was to the point, if it was not exactly considerate—was

“Young man, I think ye’re lying.”

Now Mrs. Meyer did not say anything like that to Percy Blount; but a phrase remarkably similar to it in sound passed through her mind. Nay, more, her obvious incredulity was visible in her eyes.

“I see you don’t believe me, but it’s a fact,” he maintained. “Ever since that lawsuit was settled they have been regretting it was ever begun; and now I am sure they want to make matters up. This very morning my father met Mrs. Laxbourne in the street, and she bowed to him and he bowed to her.”

“Is that so? You’re not hoaxing me?”

“I give you my word of honour that Miss Laxbourne, who was with her mother at the time, told me herself within the last half-hour.”

“Oh, very well. I will make the experiment, if you like. And I suppose I am to ask you and Mima too?”

“Oh, no, certainly not; that would be expecting far too much. Indeed, I think it would be better without us.”

“Ah, young people don’t care much about

the dinner-part of an evening," said Mrs. Meyer, in no unkindly way. "Well, you and she can come in later on, and amuse yourselves with a little sketching. You certainly don't affect much concealment about it."

"Why should we? We are engaged."

"Indeed? What does the mamma say?"

"She hasn't said anything, for she hasn't been asked. But that will be all right, I know. And as for the sketching, I am sure you are unjust, Mrs. Meyer. I never saw two people who conducted themselves with so much decorum and propriety as Miss Laxbourne and myself—never!"

"I like that! But how are you to know? You have no eyes for any one but your two selves. How are you to know how other people behave?"

A couple more visitors came in.

"I will see what our engagements are, and fix a night," she said to him.

"You are just goodness itself," he said, as she moved away to receive the new-comers.

CHAPTER V.

A DINNER PARTY.

WHEN Mrs. Meyer received from Lord Amesleigh a note accepting her invitation to dinner she began to believe that Percy Blount had reported quite truly on the position of affairs, and that she was about to purchase the honour and glory of becoming the pacificator between the two families on very easy terms. Mrs. Laxbourne accepted too; and as there was to be a crush later on in the evening, it was understood that the young people would make their appearance then.

"Do you think I dare place those two next each other at dinner?" Mrs. Meyer asked of her husband.

"I should say decidedly not, if you have any doubt about it," was the instant reply.

"Percy begged me to do it, so that they might have every chance of making it up," she said.

"You know quite well," he answered, "that when a young fellow is mad about a girl there's

nothing he won't do to serve his own ends? What does he care, when he asks you to risk a scene?"

"How can there be a scene, Philip? They are civilized people."

"Civilized people may hate each other like poison; and often do."

"If the very worst happens," she urged, but she was clearly in some doubt, "the only thing they could do would be to ignore each other's presence, and talk to their next neighbour."

"Have it your own way," said he, returning to the pages of the *Economist*; "whatever does happen will happen at your end of the table, not at mine."

This was but cold comfort; and, indeed, on the evening of the dinner-party, as the hour for the arrival of the guests drew near, Mrs. Meyer had to confess to herself that she was not a little nervous. And yet what had she to fear? Percy Blount had assured her again and again that it was impossible they should reopen so painful a subject. Both of them would be glad enough to say nothing at all about it. On the other hand, it was pretty clear that they wanted to sink their differences; why should she dread a collision between two people who were coming

to her house for the almost ostensible purpose of making friends?

Lord Amesleigh came late, and immediately after his arrival dinner was announced as served. He and his hostess, of course, went down last; and when he got to the end of the table he found Mrs. Laxbourne just taking her place—the next to his own. They bowed to each other, quite pleasantly; and Mrs. Meyer the moment they were all seated, opened the ball in a dexterous fashion.

“This should be a proud day for Lord Amesleigh,” she said, addressing Mrs. Laxbourne. “I suppose you saw what was in this morning’s papers?”

She was referring to the letter of a special correspondent in the Soudan, who described in detail a signal act of gallantry performed by Lord Amesleigh’s eldest son at a very critical moment indeed, when the Arabs had actually broken the square at one part, and mischief seemed imminent.

“Oh, yes,” said Mrs. Laxbourne, smiling, “Mima read out the account to me this morning. And we were wondering whether we should see his portrait in the illustrated journals.”

“Ah, I never thought of that,” Lord Ames-

leigh said, looking up from his soup. "Don't know how it's done. Do they ask you for a photograph?"

"Wouldn't you send it?" Mrs. Laxbourne suggested; and she added, graciously: "I'm sure we should all be proud to see it."

"I'm afraid it would be hardly the thing for the boy's own father to say he thought his portrait should be published—besides, I don't know that Charlie would like it. He is rather young to be figuring as a public character."

"What is his age, Lord Amesleigh?" said the widow; and Mrs. Meyer, seeing them now well started (to her great relief), left them to themselves, and turned to her neighbour on the other side.

Indeed, they got on very well, considering that Lord Amesleigh was not much of a talker; and Mrs. Laxbourne was considerably gracious, in her magnificent manner. Naturally, certain subjects were carefully avoided; there was not much conversation, for example, about green-houses, or windows, or lawyers, or costs. But Mrs. Meyer observed with much satisfaction that Montague continued as complaisant towards his neighbour as his business-like attention to his dinner allowed; while Lady Capulet

remained as amiable and pleasant as was consistent with her somewhat grand air.

Dinner and dessert over, the ladies went, and Mr. Meyer took his wife's place. Now the financier's port wine was excellent, and Lord Amesleigh knew it; and, having no interest in the feeble platitudes that constitute after-dinner politics (his own opinions were of a distinctly robust type, if he had cared to express them), he devoted himself to the '47 with deliberation and method. To ask the great financier for advice or assistance with regard to any of the numerous companies which his lordship was painfully trying to float or keep afloat, was, at the man's own table impossible; Lord Amesleigh had no kind of concern in the discussion of Fair Trade *v.* Free Trade; the port wine was of undeniable quality: and so far all was well.

Nevertheless, it may have been that extra glass or two of port that was responsible for what followed. When Lord Amesleigh went upstairs to the drawing-room along with the other gentlemen he was in an unusually amiable mood; and to make it evident that no ill-feeling remained between him and his former enemy, he crossed the room and took a seat side by side with the lady whom a few weeks before he had

described as a poisonous witch. Amid the general hum of conversation (guests were beginning to arrive now, and Mrs. Meyer was expecting every minute a famous baritone to make his appearance) Lord Amesleigh no doubt considered that he could speak confidentially to his neighbour; and so he said, with the pleasantest manner he could assume,

“I must not be outdone in generosity, Mrs. Laxbourne. I had not intended speaking of the little painful matter; and of course it is better to let bygones be bygones; however, you must let me say that I am quite sensible of—of—well, I will say your good sense in taking the initiative in promoting a friendly understanding, and nothing could be more amiable than your undertaking not to build the greenhouse——”

“I beg your pardon!” she said, sharply.

He looked rather surprised at her sudden change of manner.

“Your undertaking not to build the greenhouse——” he began again

“And when did I ever give any such undertaking?” said she, indignantly. “And to whom?”

He began to be a bit nettled too.

"I don't suppose you put it down in writing," he said, with a touch of impatience. "But I was certainly led to understand that you did not propose to proceed with the building of the greenhouse. Certainly I understood as much. Why, what would be the value of your expressions of regret over the whole affair if you—if you still insisted on building that house? Really——"

"Really," said the widow, breaking in upon him—and amazement as well as indignation was in her eyes—"really I don't know what you mean. My expressions of regret? My taking the initiative? It was your expressions of regret that I listened to, and took into consideration! The initiative, as I understood it, was yours. And as for any undertaking, the only undertaking I know of is that you have promised to block up that window!"

"What?" he exclaimed—and it was fortunate that the bustle of arriving visitors and of the general conversation was considerable. "What lunacy is this? Block up the window? Who said I would block up the window? I suppose you don't reflect that I shall have to pay six or seven hundred pounds for that window?"

"I suppose that when people lose a lawsuit they have got to pay," she said, with a cold magnificence of manner.

"When people have fools for counsel and dolts for judges, they may expect the verdict to go against them," he retorted.

"I dare say that is what the losing side generally think," she remarked, rather superciliously.

Where was the regret of which he had heard so much? There was a good deal more of triumph in her tone.

"The losing side?" he said, with some warmth. "Let me point out to you that you did not win everything. I don't think you will put up that hoarding again that the Court of Chancery ordered to be removed."

She flushed with vexation, but grew more stately than ever.

"Lord Amesleigh, I did not come here in order to discuss points of law with you. I was told that you deeply regretted the whole affair, that you were anxious to come to more friendly terms, that you had said if you had known the window was to have been an annoyance you would never have had it put there, and that you were going to block it up. I find I have

been grossly deceived—by stories that must have come from your son——”

“I tell you, madam, it is I who have been grossly deceived!” he exclaimed, vehemently; “and by stories that must have come through your daughter——”

“Lord Amesleigh!”

He rose.

“I wish you good evening, madam!” he said, with a profound bow, though his face was purple with rage; and so furious was he that he passed Mrs. Meyer—who was busy with her guests, and did not notice him—without bidding her “Good night!” and went downstairs, and got his coat and hat, and stormily left the house.

Then Mrs. Laxbourne, in just about as violent a temper, but outwardly calm and self-possessed, came along.

“Good night, Mrs. Meyer!” said she; and she held out her hand.

Her hostess stared.

“You are not going! There will be a little music presently. And your daughter——”

“Neither my daughter nor myself,” said Mrs. Laxbourne, “will in future go anywhere that we are likely to meet Lord Amesleigh.”

Mrs. Meyer glanced hastily round the two rooms.

"Bless me, he has gone! What has happened, dear Mrs. Laxbourne?"

The poor little woman was really in a dreadful predicament. Here were her visitors arriving—to whom she had to be smiling and civil, shaking hands, remembering names, and asking pertinent little questions—and here, on the other hand, was a guest wanting to get away, who, if she did get away in this temper, would never enter her door again. Fortunately, just at this moment there was a brief lull in the arrival of the people, and she hastily took advantage of it.

"Tell me what is the matter, dear Mrs. Laxbourne! I understood you wished to meet Lord Amesleigh; I was told he was most anxious to meet you. I hope nothing disagreeable has occurred?"

"I have been brought here under false pretences—that is all," said the widow, stiffly.

This was a little too much.

"Not of mine," her hostess said.

"No; certainly not. But I was told that Lord Amesleigh had expressed his regret about ever having gone to law, and was willing to be

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accommodating in every way, and so I consented to meet him ; and now I find him more vindictive than ever, glorying in the small piece of triumph that the Court allowed him, and imagining that I—that I—had taken the first steps to conciliate him ! Really, it is too ridiculous. The Court unanimously of opinion that he was wholly in the wrong ; and I am the one to profess to be sorry—and to give undertakings not to use my just rights——”

“It is for the victor to be generous,” said Mrs. Meyer.

“At all events, I shall not subject myself to such another interview,” said Mrs. Laxbourne, loftily. “Will you tell Mima, if she should have left before I get home, to return at once. I shall be waiting for her.”

“I am so awfully sorry, dear Mrs. Laxbourne,” the perturbed hostess said ; “and that it should have happened in my house. Won’t you stay until Mima comes ? Your carriage won’t be below.”

“I would rather go, thank you. I suppose one of your servants can get me a cab,” said the indignant widow ; and forthwith she went down to the cloak-room, and they got her a cab, and away she went home.

A little while after that Mr. Percy Blount made his appearance.

"Mima come yet?" he asked, when he got to the head of the stairs.

"No, she is not," Mrs. Meyer answered in an undertone—for there was some music going on—a violin solo, with piano accompaniment—"nor is she coming."

Something in her manner struck him.

"What is the matter?"

"Everything. As far as I understand, your father has gone away in a furious rage; and Mrs. Laxbourne is in the same condition. Didn't you tell me these two wanted to see each other?"

"Certainly I did," he answered, looking rather alarmed. "What has happened?"

"How can I tell? Apparently they have had a battle royal over that horrid law case. Didn't you tell me there would not be a word said about it?"

"Yes, I did," he answered, and now he looked rather guilty. "Certainly I did. Both of them, I know quite well, were willing to let bygones be bygones. I know it. You don't have bitter enemies bow to each other in the street. And of course we thought—I thought

—that when they met they would agree to say nothing. When you are content to let bygones be bygones, you don't rake up the whole quarrel again. How did it happen, Mrs. Meyer?"

"I tell you I don't know; but there they are—gone off; and each, I suppose, with a deadly grudge against me. I am glad there was no scene, that is all."

He stood silent for a second or two in a pretty obvious quandary. Then there was some applause within the rooms, the instrumental duet was at an end.

"Wait a moment, and I will come back to you," Mrs. Meyer said, and she disappeared into the crowd, to seize upon some other executant. When she returned, she said: "You must be able to explain, if anybody can, why there should be a quarrel. When they sat down to dinner they seemed to be friendly enough. They talked to each other just like ordinary people. I was very glad; for I hate quarrels; and I was thinking of poor little Mima. Then they came up here; and here it was the fight must have began about the lawsuit; and now both of them are gone—boiling. That is not a nice thing to have happen in one's house, you know."

She regarded him for a second with scrutinising eyes.

“Look here, Mr. Percy; what have you been up to? I fancy you must know something about this misunderstanding. It was you who were so anxious to bring them together.”

Thus challenged, he thought he might as well make a clean breast of it; and he briefly described the plan he had devised for bridging over the gulf between the two families.

“Mind you,” he added, “we didn’t tell any downright lies; but only added a little friendly colouring here and there to whatever admissions we could get them to make. Of course Mima and I thought that if we could only bring them together, that would be all that was necessary; for we assumed that they would not say a word about what was past. How they ever came to speak of it, I can’t imagine; but I can imagine how, if they were beginning to discuss matters, they might discover that their willingness to be amiable and accommodating had been a little—just a little—exaggerated. I didn’t see any harm in it—just to make them friends, don’t you know—and they did say things at times that could naturally be twisted into ‘Sorry I did it,’ ‘Wouldn’t do it another

time,' 'Make it up now, if you like.' Oh, mind this, if any one is to blame, I take the whole. Mima only said what I told her to say."

"Well," said Mrs. Meyer, looking at him with laughing eyes, though she hardly thought it was a laughing matter, "you are a pretty pair of children; and you have got into a very pretty mess this time. What are you going to do?"

"How can I say? All this is new to me. I suppose there is no chance now of Jimmie—I mean, Mima—coming here to-night?"

"Oh no, none. She will be forbidden the house, I suppose. And I don't imagine you will find the mamma so well-disposed towards you. She winked at a good deal, Mr. Percy, for she is very fond of Mima; but you've roused the lion in her this time."

"You needn't go prophesying evil, Mrs. Meyer," he said, gloomily. "What can she do?"

"I hope—I say I hope—she won't compel Mima to promise to have nothing more to do with you or your family."

"Mima won't be such a fool as to promise anything of the kind," he said, warmly.

"Children, obey your parents," observed

Mrs. Meyer, dispassionately ; but now she had to go away to attend to her guests—leaving him in a very depressed and distressful mood indeed.

CHAPTER VI.

A CONSPIRACY.

ON the second morning after the occurrence of these tragic events Mrs. Meyer had just left her house and was proceeding westward towards Notting Hill, when she met Miss Jimmie. The young lady was for passing unnoticed, her eyes bent on the pavement, a blush of embarrassment mounting to her pale and pretty face.

“Mima Laxbourne,” exclaimed Mrs. Meyer—and a woman is very indignant indeed when she addresses her friend by both Christian and surname—“Mima Laxbourne, what do you mean?”

The girl paused and looked up, in a hesitating, piteous, confused way.

“Don’t be vexed with me, dear Mrs. Meyer, but—but—mamma might think I had stopped to speak to you about Percy!”

“And why shouldn’t you speak to me about Percy?” Mrs. Meyer demanded.

"Then you don't know?" the girl said, timidly, and as she spoke the round blue eyes grew quickly moist. "It's—it's all over between Percy and me."

Downright anger kept Mrs. Meyer silent for a second, then she said—and very sharply she said it, too—

"Upon my word, people who are such maniacs as to go to law should be deprived of the custody of their children. They are not fit to be trusted with them. So it's all over between Percy and you, is it? And what does Percy say?"

"I don't know. I have not seen him. I must not see him. I am to send him back—the little presents he has given me now and again, but—but—I haven't had the heart to do that yet."

She took out her handkerchief to brush away the tears from her eyelashes. Mrs. Meyer grew more and more angry, and none the less so that she was aware of her own helplessness in the matter.

"Really, it is too ridiculous!" she exclaimed. "What did you want with a greenhouse on that side when you had those two behind?"

"I don't know," said Miss Jimmie.

"And what on earth did Lord Amesleigh want with that window?"

"I'm sure I don't know," she said, with a bit of a sob, "except to make people miserable."

"Of course I can understand your mother being vexed on finding out the trick that was played on her——"

"It wasn't a trick, Mrs. Meyer," Miss Jimmie said, pleadingly; "we only wanted to make them friends. And we thought they wished to come together, and that they would never mention the lawsuit. Percy was quite certain that everything would go right."

"And of course you thought as Percy thought. Well, you have landed yourselves into a very pretty mess; and who is going to pull you out, do you think?"

"Oh, I have no hope now," the girl said. "Mamma has quite made up her mind. It's all over. And—and I am not allowed to speak of him—to her or to any one; and—and so I'll bid you good-bye."

She held out her hand.

"Good-bye! Are you going away, then?"

"I don't know. Mamma will not tell me anything," was the answer.

So these two parted. But Mrs. Meyer, as she

went on to the florist's shop in Notting Hill High Street, and also on her way back home, was very much perturbed. She was exceedingly fond of both these young people. Her common sense was outraged by the spectacle of all this mischief arising out of sheer perversity. Then she had a married woman's natural interest in promoting a match—as if the mischief already done was not sufficient. Accordingly, when her husband came home that afternoon, she put the whole case before him.

“You had better keep out of it, anyway,” was his instant decision, for he was an unromantic person, who found his own affairs quite sufficient for the time at his disposal. “You see what has come of your interference so far. If people are determined to quarrel, they will quarrel; and they get to like it.”

“Yes; but think of poor Mima,” said his wife, with pathetic eyes. “And Percy, too. He is sure to come to me. And what can I do?”

“That is what I say. What can you do? You can't do anything. There's no Gretna Green nowadays; you can't lend them a carriage and a couple of outriders, and send them flying away to the North.”

"I know I am quite helpless, Philip," his wife confessed. "But if you would be good-natured about it, I see a way. And I'm sure you're just as fond of poor Mima as I am; and really—really to see her so miserable and heartbroken as she was this morning, and to think of its all arising from this monstrous folly——"

"People who go to law don't call it monstrous folly," Mr. Meyer observed, sententiously. "They call it obtaining justice. And they're generally very much disgusted with it when they get it."

"But other people may call it folly. Now, Philip, do be good-natured for once, and help me to put all this right," she pleaded again.

"What do you want me to do?"

"Well, I see only one way. Mima must get ill, for one thing; and frighten her mother out of her bad temper. Then I want you to go to Lord Amesleigh and offer to take up one of his companies for him——"

"I never impart sentiment into business," the financier said, curtly.

"But this once!" his wife said. "He has always got a dozen projects on hand, you say yourself. Well, if you went to him and offered him your aid, why, he'd just bow down before

you. And you could be quite frank about it. Tell him plainly you were a friend of Mima's; yes, and of Percy, too; and you wanted to see the young people made happy; and that the way to bring that about would be for him, of his own free-will, and without asking any pledge from the other side, to block up that detestable window. Then leave the rest to me."

"I don't want to be mixed up with any of his precious schemes," Mr. Meyer said, rather peevishly. "Storage of electricity in steamships—manufacture of boracic acid in Iceland—a new kind of soda-water bottle! Why is it that impecunious noblemen don't know how to sell the only thing they've got to sell—that is, their name? If they're young, they should go to America and marry a *pétroleuse*; if they're old, they should recommend a sherry. Tomorrow morning I'd give Lord Amesleigh £5,000 for sitting down and writing a letter of six or eight lines saying that the Fuente del Maestre sherry, at thirty shillings a dozen, is as fine in quality as any Amontillado he ever tasted, and that henceforth he will have nothing else at his own table——"

"And will you do that, Philip?" his wife said, eagerly.

He stared at her.

"Now do I look like the kind of person who wants to start a sherry-importing company? Is that your impression of the way in which I earn my living?"

"Oh, no, of course not," she said, hastily; "but it sounded quite practical. And—and I thought it might be good enough for Lord Amesleigh."

"Good enough to forward your dark and nefarious plans, you mean," her husband said. "Well, I will think over the matter. Let me see, what am I to bargain for—that he should block up the window in the side of his house? It isn't the way we ordinarily do business in the city. 'My dear lord,—I am willing to float your boracic acid company on condition that you block up a window.'"

"But of course you wouldn't put it that way; you would lead up to it," she said; and then she added, with adroit flattery, "and just think how proud Lord Amesleigh will be to have your name on a prospectus. It will give him quite a different standing. I am sure he will do anything you ask him."

"*Et après?*"

"Oh, I must manage Mrs. Laxbourne; and that won't be nearly so easy, I am afraid."

So matters remained for the mean time ; Mrs. Meyer, satisfied with having gained his consent, being too prudent a woman to press for immediate results. She saw nothing further of Mima Laxbourne ; she heard nothing further of Percy Blount. That young man, indeed, spent most of his leisure time in watching a certain window, but, to his ever-increasing astonishment and chagrin, he watched in vain. The telegraphic signals had ceased. Once or twice his longing imagination deceived him into thinking that the postage-stamp was there ; then on going nearer he would find the pane a meaningless blank. And how was it that he never, by any chance, met Miss Jimmie, or even caught a glimpse of her ? Had her mother shut her up ? Or did the young lady see that the coast was clear ere coming out ? Why should she avoid him—why not write a single line of comfort ? He had sent her a brief note, imploring her to let him have the smallest message of remembrance, but there was no answer.

However, if she wished to avoid him, she was caught at last. He was going up Bedford Gardens, she was coming down Campden Hill Road, and at the corner they ran full tilt against each other. She looked very frightened,

and would have passed on; but he caught her by the arm and detained her.

"Mima, where have you been? Why didn't you answer my note?"

"I am not to speak to you, Percy," she said; and she made some feeble pretence of trying to get away.

"But you've got to speak to me," said he, boldly. "I'm not going to have any nonsense now, Jimmie. We used to joke about playing Romeo and Juliet, while that confounded lawsuit was going on; but I don't mean to have it come about in earnest. Not a bit of it. I have as much right to you as your mother has——"

"You have no right to me at all, Percy," she said; but without much force of conviction.

"Haven't I? Yes, I have. You belong to me. I don't care if you had twenty mothers."

He had got hold of her hand by this time, and felt through the glove that something was missing.

"There's only one ring here," said he; "where is the other?"

"I have taken it off, Percy," she said, with downcast eyes. "I am to send it back to you, with the fan and other things. And you must give me the locket again, Percy."

"Oh, indeed ; who said so ?"

"Mamma. At least, she does not know it is a locket ; but she said I was to get back anything I may have given you."

"Well, look here, Jimmie, you're always good-naturedly hinting to me that I'm not very clever ; but at all events I'm not such an unmistakable ass as to give you back that locket ; and you may tell your mamma as much, if she is anxious for information."

"You need not speak of mamma in that way, Percy," the young lady said, as in duty bound. "I consider your father to be quite as much to blame for what has happened."

"I don't care a brass farthing who is to blame. The question is, What is to be done now ? Shall I come and see your mother and try to pacify her ? I'm not a bit afraid."

"Oh, no, no, no, Percy ; that would make everything twenty times worse ! I'm not allowed to mention your name, or your father's, or anything connected with the lawsuit." She looked up shyly. "And I shouldn't be talking to you now."

"But you are talking to me, you see ; and that's the difference betwixt you and a clam," he said—whatever he meant by it. "And I

wish to impress on your young mind that there is only one person who can release you from the promise you made to me, and that is myself; and that I don't in the least mean to do it. Why, Jimmie, where is your courage? Your mother may be in a bad temper—it isn't the first time. And your talking of sending back those little presents, and asking me for mine—why, I never heard of such nonsense.”

This confident way of talking was no doubt pleasant to hear; still she shook her head.

“It's all very well for you, Percy. You are a man; and can do and say what you like. But if you were a girl, and shut up at home, and not allowed to speak——”

“It serves you right,” said he, bluntly. “Why have you never put the postage-stamp on the window?”

“Because I am forbidden to see you.”

“And what are you doing now?”

“Oh, but this is an accident. I am not responsible.”

“Now listen to me, Jimmie,” said he, “and attend to words of wisdom. My father and your mother have chosen to go and make fools of themselves; but it would be very ill done of us to encourage them in their folly. What you

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have to do is to pay no heed to it whatever. That means, whenever you feel miserable or dispirited, you stick that postage-stamp on the pane, and come down to the Round Pond, and I'll meet you there and talk you into a common-sense frame of mind. I tell you I won't allow our engagement to be broken off—not a bit of it. Why, what would you do? Go in for one of the charitable fads, I suppose—join a sisterhood, and take to slumming—or be off to regenerate Whitechapel by teaching costermongers to waltz. Jimmie, Jimmie, that's not your line.”

Just at this moment a victoria came along; and the sole occupant of it, a lady, regarded these two with arch eyes. The young man instantly whipped off his hat; his companion, with a little bow of recognition to the lady in the carriage, and a hurried “Good-bye, Percy,” went quickly on her way. But the new-comer, seeing that she had thus unwittingly broken in upon their interview, bade her coachman turn and drive back; and in a couple of minutes she had overtaken Miss Laxbourne.

“Mima!” she called.

The girl stopped, and Mrs. Meyer stepped out of the victoria on to the pavement.

"I am awfully sorry," said she. "I didn't mean to be a spy on you, Mima, dear."

"I assure you, I assure you, it was quite an accident," the girl said, anxiously. "I had no idea of meeting him."

But here Mr. Percy Blount put in an appearance.

"What's the good of running off like that, Mima?" said he, for he had hesitated during a second or two as to whether he should follow her.

"Oh, you go away, Percy," Mrs. Meyer said, quite good-naturedly. "I want to talk to Mima by herself; I have something important to say to her."

"I can't go away, Mrs. Meyer," said he, "until I have some definite assurance from Mima. Why, she is allowing her mother to think that our engagement is broken off! Did you ever hear anything so absurd as that—all over a wretched lawsuit that neither Mima nor I have anything to do with?"

"But I think I see a way to put everything straight," Mrs. Meyer said. "At least, I hope it will be so. Now say good-bye, and go away."

He could not further disobey; and all he said in going was—

"Now remember, Jimmie, there is only one person who can release you from your promise to me; and you never will be released."

When he had gone, Mrs. Meyer turned to her companion.

"Now, Mima," she said, "you know I am very fond of both Percy and you, and I want to see you happy together; and I want to bring all this wretched quarrelling to an end. Not only that, but I think I see my way—only I must have your help."

The girl looked up inquiringly.

"You have got to fall ill."

She still looked puzzled.

"Yes; there's nothing else for it," Mrs. Meyer continued. "You see, there are two sides to the quarrel. Very well. My husband is pretty confident of being able to bring Lord Amesleigh to reason. Supposing that Lord Amesleigh were to consent to shutting up that window—without any bargain, or without even any notice—wouldn't that be a great concession?"

"It would be a very, very great concession," Miss Laxbourne said, but rather wistfully, for the possibility seemed far distant.

"Supposing, then, that we can get Lord

Amesleigh to yield so much, what is to induce your mamma to yield on her side? Your falling ill, as I say. You can easily do it—enough to make her anxious about you. You are not looking very well as it is, Mima, dear; and you can easily put on the rest. Take to your bed, pretend you can't eat; a little crying now and again would be effective; and then, when your mother is really alarmed about you, I will call and bring friendly messages from Lord Amesleigh. Do you see?"

"Mamma won't believe in any more friendly messages," Miss Laxbourne said, shaking her head.

"Won't she? Leave that to me. Now do you think you can become an interesting invalid, Mima, dear?"

"Without being really ill?"

"Certainly."

The girl paused for a second.

"It would be no use trying," she said, with a hopeless air. "Nothing would be of any use now. I have never seen mamma so determined. It's all very well for Percy to make light of it, and say that everything must come right, and people listen to reason. But there is no reason nor argument in the matter. It is silence, and

a fixed determination. What you propose would be of no use."

"I tell you it would, though—every use in the world," her friend said, distinctly. "Now, do as I bid you; it only means a little starvation; and you can read novels all day long. I must hurry away now, Mima, for I have some people coming this afternoon; but mind you do what I tell you, and get very, very ill indeed. Good-bye, dear."

Then they went their several ways—Mrs. Meyer nothing doubting of the success of her scheme.

And now Mr. Percy Blount had restored to him the hope of finding the postage-stamp on the window-pane; and each morning as he went out he glanced up at the front of Mrs. Laxbourne's dwelling. Alas! it was a far different message that those windows were destined to convey to him. One day he was startled to find that they were all shrouded in brown holland. The family had gone away, then?—and for a lengthened time? And whither? To what far land was poor Jimmie being dragged, without being allowed to leave behind her one tearful word of farewell?"

CHAPTER VII.

“WELL COUNTERFEITED.”

THERE were three persons in this railway-carriage—Mrs. Meyer, her sister-in-law (an elderly maiden lady), and Mr. Percy Blount.

“It is so many years since I was at Torquay,” Mrs. Meyer was saying, “that I suppose it will be quite altered now. Indeed, I don’t remember much about it, except the terraces on the hill-side, and the villas with the queer names, and the beautiful bay. I do remember, though, there was an hotel a little bit beyond the town—on a small promontory, and overlooking the sea, and with a pretty garden: if that is still in existence, I think we should go there. It is away from the chemists’ shops, you see. I don’t like the look of so many chemists’ shops in a place.”

Presently she said—

“I hope Mima has been doing what I told her.”
“She hasn’t been doing what I told her,” Percy Blount said. “I haven’t had a scrap of a message from her, of any kind whatever, since they went away.”

"Because she is a properly conducted young lady," her friend said, promptly, "and gives obedience where it is due. You must wait till the law gives you authority over her."

"The law?" said he. "It is the law that has been the cause of all this mischief."

"Then wait till the Church gives you authority over her."

"Whatever happens," said he, "it is awfully good of you to take so much trouble."

"My dear young man," said she, coolly, "a fortnight at the seaside never comes amiss to me, especially at this time of the year. Then Philip will be down from Friday till Monday; and that will do him a world of good—though the railway journey is so tedious. Besides, Mima is my friend; I am really anxious to see her, for I don't think she is likely to be overhappy as matters stand at present."

When, in the course of the afternoon, they arrived at Torquay, and had succeeded in getting rooms at a pleasantly-situated hotel, the two ladies turned Percy Blount adrift to shift for himself, and set off in quest of a certain villa. They found it without much difficulty, and were admitted, the parlour-maid who showed them into the drawing-room explaining

that Mrs. Laxbourne was at the moment engaged with her dressmaker, but would come to see them shortly.

Mrs. Meyer went to the window, as one naturally does at the seaside; the next moment she was calling to her sister-in-law.

"Come here, Bella, quick! Did you ever see the like of this? Look at that young minx!"

Miss Meyer went to the window instantly; and there, in the small terraced garden below, she saw Miss Jimmie, whom she knew very well, being slowly wheeled along in a Bath chair, in the warm evening light.

"She is doing it thoroughly," Mrs. Meyer said, with a laugh. "The artful hussy! She really looks quite thin. I wonder if she starves herself too?"

"She looks very ill," said Miss Meyer, gravely.

"Yes, of course she does. She was told to look ill. But just wait a moment, and I'll show you what kind of an invalid she is—if there's time before the mamma comes."

She tapped on the window. Miss Laxbourne looked up, said something to the old man who was drawing the Bath chair, and then they made for the house.

"I wish she would look sharp," said Mrs. Meyer, as there seemed to be a little delay in her making her appearance, "or her mamma will be here."

That instant the door opened, and the invalid appeared. She looked very pale and wan and fragile; and she was assisted across the room to the sofa by the old man and the parlour-maid, one on each side. Miss Jimmie held out her hand in rather a feeble fashion; and Mrs. Meyer took it and held it, as in duty bound; but the truth was that she had been startled, and was inclined to be angry.

"Mima," said she, reproachfully, as soon as these two had gone, "you needn't overdo it. Remember, you are only pretending illness. I declare you quite frightened me!"

For answer the round blue eyes grew moist with tears.

"I have not been quite so strong lately, dear Mrs. Meyer," she said, in a voice that was excellently well counterfeited, so like an invalid's it was.

"Mima, you're not really ill!" Mrs. Meyer exclaimed, in great alarm. She caught both the girl's hands in hers, and looked earnestly into her eyes.

“I have not been quite so well,” was the timid admission.

“Oh, this is dreadful!” her friend cried. “But never mind: it will be all right. I have come to put it all right—and Percy is with me——”

“What did you say?” the girl asked, quickly, and her eyes seemed half-frightened.

“Only that Percy has come with me, Mima, dear—oh, yes, he is in this town—now—at this very minute——”

Paler Miss Jimmie could not become; but the effect of this sudden announcement was to rob her of her little remaining strength; and she sank back helplessly on the sofa, her head falling to one side. Evidently, this was no pretence. She was on the verge of a fainting fit.

“Bella, some water, quick!”

There was a jug of flowers on the table. Miss Meyer whipped out the flowers, dipped her handkerchief in the water, and hastened to the sofa. They were thus engaged in restoring the girl to consciousness when her mother entered—radiant, self-confident, and profuse with apologies for having kept them waiting such an unconscionable time.

“I had no idea Mima was so poorly,” Mrs.

Meyer said, when the girl was at length sitting up again. "What is the matter?"

"There is nothing at all the matter," her mother answered, "except that she won't interest herself in anything. I really think she has just allowed herself to drift into this state through not caring. It is very absurd, of course—a girl to be so weak and listless without having anything the matter with her at all. But I dare say she has found this place dull. As soon as she gets a little better we shall go somewhere else, probably to the Continent. Vienna always seemed to me the most cheerful town to live in of any I know."

"Whynot try London?" Mrs. Meyer suggested.

Mrs. Laxbourne froze instantly.

"We have no intention of returning to London at present," she said.

"You would find some little alterations at Campden Hill," Mrs. Meyer ventured to say. And then, grown bolder, she continued, "It is for poor Mima's sake, my dear Mrs. Laxbourne, that I am anxious to talk to you about that—that unhappy lawsuit——"

"I would rather hear nothing further about it, if you please," the widow said, stiffly.

"Yes; but for Mima's sake you will listen, won't you?" the mediator pleaded.

“I don’t see how Mima has anything whatever to do with it,” was the unpromising answer.

“Well,” said Mrs. Meyer, with a little hesitation, “I—I don’t suppose it can be pleasant for her to know that the two families have quarrelled, and that she has been taken away and not allowed to communicate with Percy. But let me to tell you what has happened, Mrs. Laxbourne. Lord Amesleigh has behaved in the most handsome manner. If it is any gratification to you to know, you are left complete victor. Of course you were already aware that he had all the costs to pay—and heavy costs, too. Besides that, you were left free to build the greenhouse, if you wished. But now do you know what he has done? Of his own free will he has gone and built up the window in the side of his house; and I think I have the right to ask you if that is not a handsome act, and a frank offer of conciliation?”

Mrs. Meyer wore a triumphant air, and no wonder; for it was with a good deal of difficulty that she had induced her husband to intermeddle in any way whatever with Lord Amesleigh’s affairs. But Mrs. Laxbourne was suspicious.

“They may have told you so——”

"My dear Mrs. Laxbourne, I saw it!" the other interposed. "I give you my word of honour that the window is actually built up—I saw it with my own eyes!"

"And you have come to ask me to do something in return?" the widow asked, still distrustful.

"No; I have no commission of the kind. As I say, this has been done by Lord Amesleigh of his own free will, and there is no condition attached. But if you ask me to name something, I can; and it is a request of a very simple character. Mrs. Laxbourne, will you and Mima come and dine with us at our hotel this evening—Percy will be there?"

She was sitting on the sofa beside Miss Jimmie, holding a poor, thin, wasted hand in hers.

"Look," said she, "won't that plead with you?"

After a moment's hesitation, the widow said,

"Oh, well, I have no objection to meeting Mr. Blount; of course he will apologise for the foolish stories he told——"

"Oh, certainly, certainly! I know he is most anxious to do so," Mrs. Meyer exclaimed, although, as a matter of fact, Mr. Percy Blount

had never offered to do anything of the kind—not seeing his way to the opportunity.

“But I am afraid Mima can’t go out to dinner,” continued the widow, who appeared to be greatly mollified by this news of her having been left completely mistress of the field.

“Won’t you come and dine with us?”

“To-night?”

“Yes, if it is convenient.”

“And bring Percy?”

“Yes, if he won’t mind so unceremonious an invitation.”

“I think I can answer for that,” said Mrs. Meyer.

They remained a little while longer, and then they left; and they had not gone very far when they encountered Mr. Blount, who had been prospecting around.

“Now, my dear Percy,” said the young matron, in her business-like way, “I am going to show you the advantages of speaking the truth. You tried to patch up this affair by telling a lot of lies, as I understand it, and the result was to make the quarrel worse confounded than ever. I interfere, and tell the simple truth. What is the consequence? Why, that you are invited to dine with Mrs. Laxbourne and Mima this very evening!”

"You don't mean that!" he said.

"This very evening as ever was. Seventy-five; and they were so considerate as to say you needn't mind about evening dress—especially if you hadn't any with you."

"But how did you manage it?" he exclaimed.

"The truth—the simple truth—works wonders," she said, oracularly. "Then I have been a little longer in the world than you, though not much."

Furthermore, she had to caution him not to show any surprise or alarm when he should find Miss Jimmie looking sadly thin and white.

"If I weren't quite sure of the cause, I should be really anxious about her," Mrs. Meyer continued. "But I know what it is well enough—absence and heart-ache. Poor thing, when I told her to go away and get ill; I had no idea it was about to happen in earnest. But I will never give any girl that advice again. The fright I got when I saw her just now! However, it is for you, Mr. Percy, to bring back the roses to her cheeks. I have done all I could for the pair of you."

"And you don't think we are ungrateful, Mrs. Meyer?" said he, speaking quite naturally for both Mima and himself.

That evening, when the invited guests went to the house, Miss Jimmie looked much less like an invalid, for

Rosy-red grew she when Glenogie sate down ; and even thereafter, when her natural pallor had again asserted itself, there was still the little excitement arising from this unwonted festivity ; and obvious to all was the subdued, pleased light in the pretty blue eyes. Mr. Percy got through the apologies which Mrs. Meyer had directed him to make with sufficient cleverness ; the widow was quite gracious, in her grand fashion ; and nothing was said about the Court of Appeal or the senile imbecility of English judges.

During the course of the evening, however, Mrs. Meyer took occasion to have a little private talk with Mrs. Laxbourne.

“Now won’t you be generous ?” said the diplomatist. “You have had everything your own way, in Court and out of it. I want you to yield one point. Won’t you give up your idea of building an additional greenhouse ?”

But instantly the widow drew back, and regarded her visitor with watchful eyes.

“Was Lord Amesleigh told I would do that before he blocked up the window ?” she asked.

"Indeed he was not!" Mrs. Meyer answered, honestly enough. "I can positively assure you of that. He doesn't expect you to do anything whatever—not anything whatever; but seeing that you have got everything your own way, I think you might afford to be generous. For Mima's sake," Mrs. Meyer added.

"I never was so *very* anxious to have that greenhouse," Mrs. Laxbourne confessed, after a second.

"And you will promise to think no more about it—yes, now, you must, Mrs. Laxbourne—for Mima's sake?"

"Very well, I do make the promise," she said, good-naturedly.

"That's all right, then. And you will find that Lord Amesleigh will not be slow to acknowledge that you have acted very handsomely and generously in the matter. I am quite sure of that. Little courtesies of that kind are so much appreciated when they come unsolicited—just as he has built up that window without even telling you he was going to do it, or asking you to regard it as a favour. I am sure he will very highly appreciate your saying that you won't build the greenhouse; and surely, for poor Mima's sake—look at her, how pleased and

happy she seems!—for her sake it is better you should all be friends. Then, as to Vienna,” continued this insidious person, “do you think it is such a very healthy city. Not *very* healthy, is it? My recollection of it is that the smaller river—what’s its name?—is pretty much of a ditch.”

“I like the driving in the Prater,” said Mrs. Laxbourne, but with no great conviction. “And the music of the military bands is really beautiful.”

“Yes, that is so, perhaps,” responded Mrs. Meyer, rather absently. “Of course, you couldn’t expect to have as many friends there as in London. And Mima seems to want rousing up a little, doesn’t she? I do think your house is so conveniently situated—one never hears people grumbling about the distance—and then it is so prettily situated, and the neighbourhood so cheerful. Don’t you think Mima would rather be in her own comfortable home, and seeing people a little?”

“Yes, perhaps,” Mrs. Laxbourne admitted. “I only mentioned Vienna by—by accident, as it were.”

“Dear Mrs. Laxbourne, suppose you and Mima go back with us! Do! Take her to her

own pretty home, and make it cheerful for her ; and ask her friends to come and see her. Wouldn't that be wise? Look at her this minute ; why, she is quite a different creature from the white-faced thing we saw this afternoon."

Mrs. Laxbourne did not yield all at once, but in the end she did yield completely ; and so what was dangerously nigh becoming a tragedy was changed into comedy by the artifices and contrivances of this wily woman.

The Laxbournes returned to London ; a formal peace was concluded between the two families ; the engagement of the young people was openly recognised ; and Miss Jimmie throve and prospered in the sunshine of her new happiness, until she showed herself as healthy a lass as any you can find at this moment in the neighbourhood of Campden Hill. Only, as Mrs. Meyer sometimes says to her,

"Things have turned out very nicely, you know, my dear ; and we're all coming to the wedding ; and you'll look as pretty as pretty can be. But don't forget that you gave me a fright. When I told you to go away and pretend to be an invalid, I had no idea you would do your counterfeiting just a little too well."

A SNOW IDYLL.



CHAPTER I.

PICTOR IGNOTUS.

IT was on a wild March morning that a young English stranger left the snug shelter of the inn at Inver-mudal and adventured forth into the wintry landscape that lay all around. He was accompanied by two stalwart gillies, who carried his angling gear for him; for this intrepid young man, notwithstanding the weather, was bent upon trolling for salmon on Loch Naver. What else, indeed, could he do? By profession a landscape painter, he had come into these wilds with some notion of making a series of studies of early spring; but he had found the whole country clad in a monotonous garment of snow; subjects there were none; so, being something of a fisherman as well, and having

fortunately brought his rods and tackle with him, he thought he could not do better than go after the salmon until nature should choose to reappear from under her shroud of white.

How could he have painted in this weather? The air was filled with driving sleet; a bitterly cold wind was blowing down from the hills and along the strath; it seemed to him, as he trudged through the thick, soft-yielding snow, that very soon he would be choked, blinded, and benumbed all at once. No doubt the scene around him, even as he saw it through this veil of sleet, was impressive enough—the white, hushed moorlands leading away up to the solitary ghost-like shoulders and peaks of Ben Loyal; the long loch before him driven into a livid blackness, save for certain patches of blue-grey near the shore which he guessed to be ice; then above him, stretching far into the moving mists, rose the giant bulk of Ben Clebrig, the cloud-compeller and brewer of gales and hurricanes. It was an impressive sight, no doubt, but to him it was useless. Nay, as he tramped along this highway, he began to say to himself that snow was the very ugliest thing in nature—or, at least, that it made everything else look mean and dirty and depressing. The water down

there was black; the stems of the trees blown bare by the wind were black; any bit of exposed rock was a blot in the landscape; even the russet scars of the moorland, showing here and there through the driven snow, had no grateful warmth of colour in them. It was all unpaintable, unusable, a disappointment to a pair of eyes that were accustomed to seek eagerly and lovingly for the beautiful aspects of the world.

However, here was the salmon-fishing. They got away down to the side of the loch; and while the gillies brushed the snow from the seats of the boat, and broke the ice in the bottom, he began to get together his tackle as well as his benumbed fingers would allow. Then, when everything was ready, they shoved the boat some way through the ice; they all got in; they shoved her still further and further through, until at last they reached open water, and now Mr. Sydney Durham proceeded to get out his lines. These moments, as every salmon-fisher knows, are moments of blessedness. All unknown as yet are the long hours of waiting, the growing hopelessness and apathy, the joyless trudge home in the evening: when the phantom minnows are dropped into the water,

when the thirty yards of line have been paid out, when the fisherman settles down to watch the points of the two rods, his imagination peoples the loch with eager-roaming salmon, and he knows that any passing second may be succeeded by a sudden whirr and shriek of the reel. Our young artist forgot all about the colourlessness of the landscape around him. The water might be like ink—he cared not, if it held fish. And so the two gillies slowly pulled the boat along these winding shores, the while his eyes were intently fixed on the surface of the loch, watching for the swift springing into the air of a twenty-pounder—or even a ten—that would reward him, and more than reward him, for all his pains.

For it was bitterly cold. The wind blew down from Clebrig's snow-slopes and swept across the loch; swirls of sleet swung round him, half blinding him and getting in at neck and wrist; his hands were soaking wet through the woollen gloves; his feet were stone dead. And still the two gillies patiently explored every bay and crept round each successive headland; and not a sound broke the silence of this hushed white world. As time went by his eager hopes departed one by one. Absently he

began to regard the features of the landscape—the indented bays, the birch woods, the wide moorlands, the far peaks and shoulders of the hills; and perhaps he may have asked himself what he should do in this remote neighbourhood if it turned out that neither painting nor fishing were possible as an occupation. Another fancy may have struck him. It should have been said that three objects, and not two, had brought him to Inver-mudal. In town, Sydney Durham was an exceedingly sociable person and an excellent companion (at the Arts Club, no one but the hall-porter ever thought of calling him anything but Sydney), but from time to time a craving for absolute solitude would come over him, and he would go away and hide himself in some distant and lonely place, passing the time there no one knew how. It was partly on this account that he had come to Inver-mudal, the seclusion of which in winter-time was well known to him; so it is to be imagined that when, on his arrival, he was informed that a lady and gentleman were expected on the very next day, and moreover that they had bespoken the private sitting-room that usually fell to his share—he was none too well pleased. And now in this boat, as the slow hours went by, and as

he became frozen to misery point, with never a single salmon showing a sign, he may with some cause have complained of his evil fortune. He had come to Inver-mudal with three objects in view—landscape-painting, salmon-fishing, and solitude—and it seemed as if he were not to secure any one of them! And what right had these strangers to come and occupy his particular room?

“Look here, Duncan,” he said, turning round from the useless rods, and addressing one of the gillies, “have those people who are coming here to-day ever been at Inver-mudal before?”

“Oh, yes, sir,” responded Duncan, “they were here the last summer for two or three weeks.”

“But what’s the use of a woman coming up here just now?” he said, rather petulantly. “Is she going to come out fishing in weather like this? The man must be mad to bring his wife to such a place at this time of the year!”

“It’s his dochter, sir,” said Duncan.

“Well, that’s worse! How is a girl likely to stand this kind of thing?”

Duncan did not know, so Duncan did not answer. The young artist turned to his rods again, and the boat went on in silence.

At lunch-time they shoved the boat through the ice and got ashore, while Sydney Durham walked along to a large rock where he expected to find some shelter. Alas! when he began to undo the little parcel with his frozen fingers, he found that the wind was coming in fierce swirls, and nowhere could he get away from those blasts of sleet. So there was nothing for it but to stand about in the wet, and kick his toes on the stones, and eat the moist cold mutton and still moister bread. Thereafter a pipe consoled him somewhat; then they all three got into the boat again, and resumed their slow and unprofitable labour.

In the afternoon, however, this dull apathy was suddenly broken in upon. While he was thinking of far other matters, a violent shaking of the rod—a long, wild scream of the reel—a flash into the air some fifty yards away—all these things seemed to happen at once; and the next moment he found himself standing up in the boat, the rod in his left hand, the frozen fingers of the right trying to reel in the line rapidly, for the salmon was coming quietly towards him. Quietly—but only for a second or two: he changed his tactics—plunged with a sudden jerk, and lay deep in the water

tugging and tugging—then he yielded a little—again he was off with a long shriek from the reel—presently he was on the surface, lashing with head and tail, a fearful sight to see!

“He’s a wicked beast, that,” said Duncan, as the fish again disappeared and plunged away down into unknown deeps.

“There’s no mistake about his being a clean salmon any way,” the fisherman said, as he anxiously waited for the next movement of his invisible foe. “There’s nothing of the kelt about a fellow who can fight like that.”

“Oh, he’s a clean fish, sir, sure enough,” the tall gillie said, “ay, and a good fish too. I’m thinking he’ll be twelve pounds whatever.”

The salmon lay deep down and sulked. It was a treacherous calm, and not to be trusted. Durham was quite certain that his enemy meditated something desperate after this temporary rest, and anxiously he watched the line, and nervously he scanned the water. All of a sudden there was a slackening that sent his heart to his mouth, for he made sure the fish had dropped off; but a rapid reeling in told him that he was still there, though continuing to come to the surface. And then away went this splendid creature with a mighty

rush, tearing the water with the line ; and again he sprang into the air ; and again he fell on the surface with a crash ; and again he plunged below, and tugged and shook to get rid of this dire thing that he had snapped at in an unguarded moment. But these various performances were clearly exhausting his strength. By-and-by there were no more rushes and leaps into the air. He was coming nearer to the surface. The fisherman felt he had the mastery now ; the pliant rod kept on its equal strain ; now and again they caught a glimmer of the salmon, slowly moving, and not more than twenty yards off. Cautiously the boat was backed down on him ; the line was reeled well in ; then a steady strain was put on the yielding fish, and Peter, the other gillie, came down into the stern of the boat, with the bright steel clip in his hand. The fateful climax was approaching, and it cannot be doubted that the artist-fisherman was exceedingly nervous and breathless, for the first salmon of the season is an important kind of creature. Nearer and nearer the big fish was raised to the surface of the water, though he was now aware of his danger, and kept swerving away as much as he was able. More than once Peter put out

the gaff to see if he could not reach him. Inch by inch Duncan kept backing the boat.

“Now, Peter, you’ll have him this time!”

Peter, with one hand on the gunwale, stretched out the gaff with the other, and watched for the slow-moving fish to come under it. At the same moment—could they credit their eyes?—was such a thing possible?—the phantom minnow lost its hold and sprang into the air—the salmon, just out of reach, hung in the water for a second or so—then it seemed to feel that it was longer a captive, and the next instant it had sunk out of sight and was seen no more.

For several seconds not one of the three men spoke—the gillies were too awe-stricken by such a catastrophe; the fisherman, with affected resignation, merely got in the phantom-minnow to see that the hooks were uninjured. But presently, when he found that the men were pulling back to the fishing ground, he bade them alter their course; he was going home. It was altogether too wet, and cold, and miserable, he said; they had had their chance and lost it; the afternoon was wearing on; he would try some other day in better weather. So they rowed him in to the land;

he left them to get the tackle together ; and then he set out for the inn, through an afternoon that was prematurely darkened by the soft-falling snow.

When, later on in the evening, Sydney Durham, having got into a dry costume, came down to the small public-room of the hotel, which had been assigned to him in lieu of the sitting-room from which he had been dispossessed, he found covers laid for three, he was not in the very best of humours. He had lost the only fish he had seen as yet, and he had been shunted out of his sitting-room by two strangers. Moreover, would he not have their society thrust upon him morning, noon, and night? Even if he escaped from them during the day, and got away upon the loch, would not they be bawling to him as the boats crossed, and disturbing his observation of landscape effects or his wandering reveries? Accordingly, when the soup had been placed on the table, and when he heard footsteps in the passage without, he was not at all grateful that he should have found neighbours in this remote and lonely spot, and he was not prepared to accord them a very enthusiastic welcome. No doubt they were a couple of discontented

English tourists grumbling at everything they met, wondering why they had ever come to such a place, and ridiculing everything not in consonance with their own habits and circumstances in the south. No doubt they were——

But here the door was opened, and a short, stout, elderly gentleman made his appearance, holding the handle of the door until his daughter had passed into the room. Now a young man's resentment very speedily vanishes, when he finds the shy and modest eyes of a pretty young lady regarding him, and that in no unfriendly fashion. Even the papa—with his wholesome pink and white complexion, his clear blue eyes, and grizzled hair and short grey whiskers—seemed a pleasant-looking person; while, as for the daughter, Sydney's first swift glimpse of her rather startled him: this was not quite the kind of tourist he had expected. The two strangers bowed; Mr. Sydney Durham bowed. No names were mentioned; but all of them were aware that each knew the other's name, through the intervention of the Highland servant-lass Nelly. Mr. Hague took the head of the table; his daughter sat on his right hand; and the artist-fisherman accordingly found himself sitting opposite the young lady.

At first, of course, the conversation was confined to the weather, and to the perils the two travellers had encountered in driving from Lairg, for several times their carriage had had to leave the highway on account of the deep snow-drifts. But by-and-by the talk became more friendly and personal; and the young lady's papa (what an important position to hold!) was quite frankly communicative about himself, about herself, and their bygone experiences and their present plans. As for Sydney Durham, under the benign influence of those soft grey-blue eyes that glanced across the table towards him from time to time—and always with a kind of pleased, sympathetic, and interested expression in them—he was cordiality itself. He gave splendid accounts of the salmon he had caught in Loch Naver, even in the wildest weather. He talked enthusiastically of the grandeur of the scenery; and of the difference between the Highlands now and during the autumn season, when the mosquito-tourist buzzes everywhere abroad. These two were no longer tourists in his eyes. No, no; they were valuable human beings, whose companionship in these solitary wilds would produce many a snug and pleasant

evening. He called on the willing Nelly to heap more peats on the glowing fire; the twin lamps on the table burned brightly; and even as he talked he knew, or felt, that the young lady with the pale clear complexion and soft chestnut-brown hair was regarding him with those gentle, timid, friendly eyes—eyes, moreover, that sometimes forgot their timidity and glanced up with a quick, bright laugh, very pleasant to see. He no longer resented the coming of these strangers to Inver-mudal.

During the course of the evening, Durham learned that this Mr. Hague was a Calcutta merchant, who had just retired from business, and who meditated setting up an establishment of some state in London. But it was not fashionable society that Mr. Hague wanted to enter or to entertain. From sundry hints and admissions the young artist came to the conclusion that this elderly gentleman was as ambitious as Mr. Gilead P. Beck himself to make the acquaintance of distinguished persons; nay, he had been more fortunate than that famous worthy, for on one awful occasion he had had speech of the Laureate. It was in a railway carriage on the Portsmouth line, Durham gathered. Whether Mr. Hague sud-

denly turned pale and trembled when he found who was sitting opposite him, will probably never be known; nor yet whether he tried to flee from the carriage at the very next station; for he was unusually reticent about this notable interview; and, indeed, it may be suspected that the conversation that took place between the great poet and his humble adorer merely related to the opening or shutting of a window. At any rate, Mr. Hague admitted that he had gone on to the Isle of Wight, and even hung about the neighbourhood of Freshwater for a few days; alas! in vain, for the acquaintanceship was not renewed.

But just imagine the old gentleman's joy when Sydney Durham hinted that if Mr. Hague began to purchase a series of pictures for this big house he had set his mind on, it was quite within the bounds of possibility that he might be invited to the Academy dinner.

"The fact is, nobody is anybody in England who hasn't been at least once to the Academy Banquet," continued the young man. "It's a distinction in itself—better than a bit of blue ribbon. They say—of course, I don't know—I'm an outsider, but they say that several wealthy men keep on buying expensive pictures

just that they may have their invitation to the banquet renewed. Of course, the Academicians are quite right in paying a compliment to men who have the sense to buy the best of contemporary art, rather than spurious old masters or copies. And the outsiders may talk as they please, but the Academy does take in all the painters who are worth anything—in time, of course—a fellow must show what he can do—and sometimes prejudices are to be overcome, but in the end the best men get in, undoubtedly.”

“I certainly looked forward to buying pictures for my house.” Mr. Hague interrupted, somewhat eagerly. “Yes, yes; what is a house without pictures? Not that I should set myself up as a judge. I would rather have the opinion of somebody who knew—and I should want good pictures when I am about it.”

“Mightn’t you ask Mr. Durham to advise you, papa?” Miss Anne Hague put in very prettily, “if he would be so kind.”

“Oh, I should be delighted!” the young man exclaimed. “The very thing I should enjoy, if I can be of any use to you at all. Of course, you can’t get just exactly what you want. I should like to be able to step into the

open market, with an unlimited purse in my pocket, and have a chance of buying up all my favourite pictures for a gallery of my own. Just think! I would have Millais's 'Effie Deans'—was there ever anything painted more tragic and pathetic than that?—and Leighton's 'Slinger,' and Tadema's 'Sappho,' and Pettie's 'Chieftain's Candlesticks,' and Orchardson's 'Queen of Swords,' and Watt's 'Sunrise,' and Burne Jones's 'Mermaid,' and Boughton's 'Waning of the Honeymoon,' and many another that I can recall; but of course that is impossible. The lucky people who have pictures of that kind are not likely to part with them. So, Mr. Hague, you would simply have to take your chance; and the first picture I should have, if I were you, would be a portrait of Miss Hague by Millais."

The young lady opposite him started a little, but instantly lowered her eyes; then this bold young man continued,

"Yes, I would; there's no one can paint women like Millais. Then I would have examples of all the men I have mentioned, just as I could get them, picking up one here and there. You must have a Faed, of course—a Highland subject, soft, rich colour, and beautiful

light and shadow ; a MacWhirter, birches and blue sky, perhaps, for you can't get 'Loch Coruisk,' I know ; a Peter Graham—a hill-side dappled with sun and shadow that makes you think you can smell the bog-myrtle—then, for change, one of Marcus Stone's courtship scenes in an old-fashioned garden, with blue haze under the trees—Briton Riviere might paint you a replica of one of his moonlight scenes, with green-eyed lions wandering over ruins—my goodness ! there's one picture of his I remember that is enough to make anybody shiver, it is so lonely and eerie. Then you must have a Colin Hunter—I should have six if I could afford it ; for the longer I look at water, either sea water or loch water, the more I am convinced that no man, living or dead, has ever painted it as Hunter can paint it, with such a life and motion and glancing of light—I am certain no man has ever painted the sea as vividly and truly as that fellow has done it—confound him ! for I should like to have had a try myself ; but when I look at those things of his, I give in—then you must have one of Henry Moore's Channel pieces—a blue one, if possible—then a bit of the fen country by Macbeth—some birds by Marks—a rustic

wedding by Fildes—one of Hook's Cornish sea-pieces——”

And so he went on, naming this one and that, both among the Academicians and the outsiders, until he had constructed a gallery very fairly and widely representative of contemporary English art; but ever he returned to the point that while he, Mr. Hague, ought to have his own portrait painted by Oules or Herkomer or some equally capable artist, it was his first and bounden duty to have his daughter's portrait painted by Sir John Millais.

“He wants a long price,” said the Calcutta merchant, thoughtfully.

“But he gives you value for your money, and what more can any one want?” the young man exclaimed. “Why, the rich men of this country ought to be precious glad that there is such an artist alive as Millais to paint their wives and daughters for them! If ever I were to marry, I'd have my wife's portrait painted by Millais, if I had to take the coat off my back to pay for it.”

“I'm afraid the coat wouldn't go far with Sir John,” observed Mr. Hague, without meaning any disrespect to the young man's attire. “Still, I think you are right; I shall have the

best men all round, if I can manage it; and I shall be extremely obliged to you, Mr. Durham, for any advice or note of introduction you may deem advisable. I presume those artists would not consider it impertinent if I called upon them with a view to buying a picture or two?"

"I think they would rather like it," said Sydney Durham, modestly, "from what little I know of them."

Dinner had been over some time.

"Are you ready, Anne?" said Mr. Hague, and then he rose; while the young man sprang to the door.

"Good evening," said Miss Anne, with a very charming smile and an inclination of the head, as she passed him.

"My daughter and I have passed a most agreeable evening, thanks to you," the papa was good enough to say; "and I hope to talk to you further about those pictures, if you will be so kind as to give me your advice."

So the young artist was left to light his pipe and sit in front of the solitary fire, dreaming idle and not unpleasant dreams. He came to think that if only he could paint like Millais—

what a gigantic *if*!--he knew where he should go for his first subject. The face—every lineament of it, and its gentle and expressive eyes—came between him and the crimson smouldering of the peat.

CHAPTER II.

A SUMMONS.

NEXT morning Sydney Durham looked out eagerly. Alas! there was the same misty drizzle of snow; everything looked bleak, and cold, and miserable; in such weather it was hardly probable that Miss Anne, or her father either, would come down to the boat. Indeed, the old gentleman had confessed the night before that this was not at all what he had bargained for. He had been told that salmon-fishing in the spring was an interesting and not too arduous pastime; the inn at Inver-mudal had been recommended to him as comfortable quarters; and he had easily persuaded his youngest daughter to accompany him on a journey of exploration. But when he arrived at Lairg to find the whole country-side covered

with snow—the mail-carts stopped, and the moors almost impassable—and when, having eventually arrived at the inn, he heard from the young artist-fisherman of the ice on the loch and the discomforts of sitting in an open boat amidst sleet and driving winds, he concluded to let the salmon alone until some pleasanter weather should arrive. Accordingly, when Sydney had breakfasted, he got his traps together, summoned his two gillies, and somewhat disconsolately set off for the loch, which he found to be just as cheerless, and dismal, and uncomfortable as on the previous day.

But you never know what is going to happen on Loch Naver. Ben Clebrig, the cloud-compeller, is full of surprises; the giant magician plays with the weather as with some splendid toy. Towards eleven o'clock the sleet and snow gradually ceased; the air seemed to grow whiter and more white; all of a sudden the heavens opened, and behold!—ere one was aware of the change—the ruffled loch became of the intensest blue, while a warm sunshine spread itself abroad. A want of colour in snow time?—look at the birch woods that the winds have shaken bare—they are of the most delicate ethereal purple; look at the exposed knolls of

withered grass and bracken—they burn like gold. And ever, as he sits and watches this magic transformation, the skies above grow clearer and clearer, and the loch becomes of a darker and darker blue; while the great white amphitheatre of mountains—Ben Hee and Ben Hope, Ben Loyal and the giant Clebrig—seem to enclose a smiling and beautiful, if voiceless and untenanted, Paradise. How grateful this warm sunshine on face and hands! How gladdening to the eyes the dark and vivid colour of this lapping water!

And then, far away, he suddenly descried certain small black figures on the waste of snow.

“Duncan,” he exclaimed, “are they coming down to the other boat?”

“Yes, sir; I’m thinking that,” Duncan answered.

He looked again.

“Is the young lady with them?”

“Yes; I’m thinking that too,” said Duncan, who had the eyesight of a sailor.

“Well, you must pull me back to the landing-place,” the young man continued. “Mr. Hague hasn’t brought the right sort of traces with him, and we must see him properly rigged out,”

“ Will ye go ashore, sir ? ”

“ Yes ; pull back to the landing-place.”

Now if Sydney Durham had been considerably impressed by the appearance of the fair young stranger who had wandered into these wilds, he was still more convinced that she was remarkably good-looking when he now landed and advanced towards the little party ; for the walk along from the inn through the crisp air had brought some colour into Miss Anne's face, which was naturally rather pale ; and this rosy glow showed all the more that round her neck she wore a boa of white fur, on which her chin softly nestled. She bade him good morning with friendly eyes. There were mutual congratulations on the change in the weather ; and she was enthusiastic about the beauty of this white snow-picture. Then he was perforce obliged to turn to the purpose for which he had come ashore ; and presently he was overhauling the old gentleman's fishing-tackle, and offering his own where that seemed preferable.

Mr. Hague, being fully equipped, embarked, and his gillies began to shove the boat through the ice ; but when Sydney suggested that Miss Anne should accompany her papa, the young lady declined. She would merely be in the

way, she said; she would rather go for a walk along the loch-side; but as she understood the two gentlemen were coming ashore to lunch at the big rock down there, she would return in time to join them. Sydney told her to keep a sharp look-out, and probably she might see a few hinds or a stag or two—for the deer had become very tame by reason of the snow. And so she set forth, and he went back to his boat and his slow circumnavigation of the lake.

That proved to be a very pleasant little luncheon-party under shelter of the big rock; and Miss Anne, being the only one whose fingers were not frozen, was so kind as to take off her gloves and untie the little parcels for them. Nay, she cut the bread for them; and carved for them when carving was necessary; and would have opened the bottled beer, too, if Sydney had allowed her, so compassionate was she over their poor benumbed hands. As for her, after her brisk walk, she looked very warm and snug and comfortable; and her eyes were most amiable and good-humoured; and her pretty oval face was as bright and fresh-coloured as ever, nestled upon that thick white fur. It is true that as they sat here and chatted—it was about pictures, mostly—Sydney was somewhat

chagrined to discover that neither Mr. Hague nor his daughter had ever seen any of his work. No doubt (he said to himself) Miss Anne had heard of his name or she would not have asked him to advise her father in his purchases; but he was pretty well convinced, from what they said, or from what they did not say, that they entirely misunderstood his position. They had not heard, then, that his chief picture of last year had been bought by the Academy out of the Chantrey Fund? They were not aware that his imminent election into the sacred body was regarded as a foregone conclusion by the artist fraternity of London? No; to them he was "*but* a landscape-painter," endowed perhaps with some vague reputation as being a young man of promise. Well, Sydney Durham was a modest young fellow; he was not likely to vaunt himself; indeed it rather amused him to notice that when Mr. Hague was talking of all the artists whom he should like to see represented on his walls, no mention was by any chance made of the very one whom he was addressing. Neither father nor daughter had asked to be allowed to see *his* sketches.

And yet she had heard enough of him to know that he was a landscape-painter—to this

small eminence of fame had he crept—for here, as they still chatted about pictures, she asked him when he was going to leave off fishing and resume his work.

“I have had no chance as yet,” said he, “the weather has been so bad. And universal snow is too monotonous—though it is wonderful what gradations of light and even colour you find in it, when you come to look at it closely. However, I’m going to wait until some of it is melted on the lower ground, to let the moors and the woods show through; then the mountains will still be white, or mostly white.”

“But just what is before you now,” she suggested, “wouldn’t that make a beautiful picture by itself?—the little bay, the boats at the point, the reflections on the ice, the blue water beyond, and then the snow-peaks, wouldn’t that do?”

“It would make a pretty drawing-masterish kind of a sketch,” said he, carelessly. “But you can’t paint a serious picture without thinking about it.”

“Mr. Durham,” said she, laughing, “I’m afraid you find the salmon-fishing too attractive. I understood that this was the time of the year when artists were at their busiest,

getting ready for the Academy. Do you exhibit at the Academy?"

"Oh, yes," he replied, gravely, "when they are good enough to give me a place."

"And shall you be sending anything this year?" she asked.

"I hope so."

"Then I shall see it," she said. "Fancy, this will be my first Academy! I was taken away from England when I was twelve—and though we have been home again more than once, I have always missed the Academy somehow. Of course, papa will have an added interest, if he goes with the intention of securing some of the pictures."

"I think I could get you a couple of tickets for the Private View," said he.

"Oh, could you?" she said, with her eyes brightening.

"I think so. Then you could give the early morning to looking at the pictures and the afternoon to looking at the people."

"But we should want some one to point them out."

"The pictures or the people?"

"Both," she said, with a laugh. "At least I for one should feel an absolute stranger."

"If I could be of any service to you—" he timidly suggested.

She glanced towards her father; but the old gentleman had left the young people to talk to themselves; he was contentedly munching a piece of cake, while his eyes were fixed absently on the blue water and the far white shores. Seeing that she did not respond, Sydney proceeded more boldly—

"If you like, I will write at once, and see if I can't get three tickets promised. Then, if that turns out all right, we could appoint a meeting-place—the central sculpture-gallery—at ten sharp; and I shall have had a look round on Varnishing-Day—I shall be able to direct you to the chief pictures without any loss of time."

"Well, it is most kind of you," said the young lady, with downcast eyes. "But I don't think we can allow you to take so much trouble——"

"Trouble!" he exclaimed; "it will give me the greatest pleasure. And perhaps I shall be able to show you on the walls something that will remind you of your visit to the Highlands in mid-winter."

And with that the old gentleman came out of his contemplative dreams only to learn that this

forward young man had made an assignation with his daughter, to the effect that all three should meet in Burlington House, at ten o'clock sharp, at the next Private View of the Academy.

After luncheon Miss Anne was persuaded to accompany her father, and forthwith got into his boat ; so that Sydney was somewhat reluctantly forced to separate from these two companions whose intrusion upon his own favourite retreat he had at first bitterly resented. He was very nearly offering to go with them, under the excuse that Mr. Hague's tackle might want some supplementing ; but a wholesome fear of suspicion deterred him ; so he set to work on his own account, and resumed his patient trolling along the solitary little bays.

There was small chance of fishing. The wind had veered with the sun ; the sky was perfectly cloudless ; the strong sunlight poured down on the loch ; and but for the fact that there was still some wind to ruffle the dark blue surface of the water, they might just as well have remained on shore. Sydney, indeed, paid little heed to his two rods. He watched for the coming round of the other boat ; and as the two cobsles passed each other, there was

always some word of inquiry or encouragement called across; and he had a glimpse of Miss Anne's pretty face. He began to wonder if she had a sweetheart—as if that were any concern of his. He convinced himself that she had—a remarkably good-looking and pleasant-humoured and engaging girl like that could not have reached her twentieth year (as he guessed) without having attracted the attention of plenty of impertinent young fools. And perhaps one of them had had the audacity to claim her for his own?—for the very prettiest and finest-natured girls were always throwing themselves away on nincompoops and boobies. A girl like Anne Hague never knew her own value; she was always too modest; she was ready to take it as an enormous favour and compliment when some microcephalous simpleton condescended to ask her to become his wife; of course Miss Hague must be engaged. And to what kind of a person?—this was his next speculation. Some lanky, long-legged sub-lieutenant whom she had met on board the P. and O. steamer that had brought her home—a cigarette-smoking kind of a creature, with no more brains in his head than pence in his pocket? Or perhaps some fat old Indian merchant, with puffed

cheeks and bilious eyes, had had the monstrous impudence to seek a young bride, and had been successful in his hideous wooing by pleading a long friendship with her father? And what was more likely than that the accepted suitor would be following his lady-love into the Highlands? Whom should he be prepared to meet, then?—the lanky young subaltern or the yellow-eyed nabob? A pretty addition to the household at Inver-mudal! Perhaps he would be expected to give up his boat to the new-comer—as a compliment to Miss Hague!

“They’ve got hold of a fish, sir,” said Duncan, suddenly, startling him out of his jealous and wrathful reveries.

“Have you seen him, Duncan?” he asked eagerly. “Is he a clean fish?”

“No, sir; he has not showed above the water yet.”

“Why doesn’t the old gentleman stand up?—he’ll never fight a fish like that!”

“Mebbe he is feared, sir,” the gillie said, with a demure grin. “I hef seen chentlemen not used to the salmon that would hef their knees shaking at the first run; ay, and them not able to stand up at ahl. There he goes, sir!—it’s a clean fish!”

"Oh, that's all right; I hope he'll get him now. It is the young lady who has brought them luck."

And very keenly did the three pair of eyes in this boat watch the struggle going on away at the other side of the loch. Of course they could not hear the scream of the reel; they could only make out what the fish was doing when he broke the surface of the water; and they could guess by the elevation of Mr. Hague's rod that he was not putting any great pressure on the salmon, so that the fight promised to be a long one. Indeed Sydney's men had time to row all across the head of the loch and down the other side until they were within hailing distance of the other party before the quick glitter of a white thing in the air showed that the fish had been safely got into the coble.

"I congratulate you!" Sydney called, as they drew near; but the old gentleman was far too much agitated to reply.

"What weight is he?" the young man called again.

"Eleven pounds, sir," answered one of Mr. Hague's gillies.

"You'll get another before the afternoon's over."

"It is your turn, Mr. Durham," was Miss Hague's rejoinder, as the boats again slowly separated.

But it was not salmon that were in his mind as the calm afternoon wore into a still calmer evening, and for the time being he almost forgot Miss Anne. The extraordinary beauty of the scene around stirred the artist's soul within him, and yet with a touch of sadness, for it seemed so impossible that any adequate record or transcript of it could be made and carried away—even in memory. Who could put upon any canvas those far-reaching snow-slopes, that were now of rarest rose, with every dell and corner marked in lines of faintest azure? In the wan green sky of the east hung a solitary orange cloud, soft and motionless and distant, as if belonging to another world altogether; while high above Clebrig hung the silver crescent of the moon, looking down upon the dying glory of the west. It was all too wonderful—too ethereal in texture and subtle in its atmospheric gradations—to be attempted by mortal brush. He might as well have tried to convey the curious sense of solitariness produced by those now darkening shores, where not even the cry of a home-winged bird broke the

silence. After this display of splendour the world was sinking into the still, hard, voiceless sleep of a winter night.

And yet, as the boats were brought to land, and the black figures proceeded to make their way home through the snow, some faint remembrance of that evening glory still hung in the sky; and Miss Anne was asking her companion at this moment whether the beautiful snow-picture that had surrounded them while on the loch had not tempted him to forsake salmon-fishing for ever and set seriously to work.

"All that was beyond me," he said. "But I have been thinking I might take your suggestion of the luncheon-party at the rock, the boats at the point, and the gillies crouching under the stone wall. The reflections on the ice would be difficult to manage, perhaps. I'll have another look to-morrow. You must come down at lunch-time, Miss Hague, for I want a group of figures at the rock."

"Oh, yes, certainly," said she, at once and pleasantly. "I shall be glad to come down and see how you have been getting on."

That seemed a simple promise and one easy of fulfilment; and yet it turned out otherwise. They had just gained the welcome shelter of

the inn, when Miss Anne, who was leading the way through the lobby, picked up an envelope from the table.

"Here is a telegram for you, papa."

"I hate telegrams," he said, snappishly. "I wish people would let me alone when I wish to be alone."

But, of course, he had to read the message; and when he had done so, he said, deliberately—

"It is vexatious; but it's got to be done. Anne, I shall have to start off for the south to-morrow morning."

"Papa!"

"Oh, it's got to be done, that's all," he said. "Most likely I shall only have to be in London a few days, and then I'll come back, for I want to see some more of this salmon-fishing. You will remain here, of course; it wouldn't be worth your while to travel all the way to London and back for nothing. If it turns out that I must go on to Lisbon, then that would be too long for you to remain here; probably I should not think of coming back; and in that case I will telegraph to you, and you must make your way south by yourself; I shall have some one waiting for you at Euston. But if I have merely to be in London for two or three days,

you'll be able to find something to do during the time I may be gone."

"Oh, yes," she said, cheerfully enough, and that was all that Sydney heard of the matter.

But as he went to his own room to prepare for dinner, it may frankly be confessed that he regarded this new condition of affairs with a good deal of concern, not to say absolute dismay. For what would be his relations with Miss Anne when she was left alone in this remote and solitary little inn? They could not become strangers all at once, and pretend to ignore each other's existence. For mere courtesy's sake, he was bound to do what he could to enliven her solitude; but how much of her society could he claim, in these peculiar circumstances, without causing her embarrassment? Take the next evening, for example. The three of them had dined together, not because this room was regarded as a public room (for it had been handed over to Sydney in exchange for the one from which he had been ousted), but because it was more convenient for the servants than the other sitting-room, which was in a wing of the house. Very well; to-morrow evening would Miss Anne make her appearance, alone, to dine with him *tête-à-tête* (which would be just about as

awkward for him as for her); or would she be forced into the apparent discourtesy of a refusal, which would leave a distinct sense of constraint between them, even if she did not wholly avoid his society as the easiest way out of the difficulty? Sydney did not like this situation of affairs at all; it seemed hard, just as this very pleasant alliance and companionship was being formed, that it should fall to the young lady herself to be obliged to sever it, even at the risk of seeming discourtesy. But what else could she do, he sadly asked himself: the possibility of a little dinner-party of two—he and she, and no one else—was far too wild and wondrous a thing to be seriously entertained.

CHAPTER III.

SEVERED.

THERE was a sharp frost that night, and next morning showed a hard, clear, steel-blue sky, with brilliant sunshine lighting up the snow-bound world, so that the birds took to chirping blithely among the leafless trees. It was altogether a cheerful morning, the very morning

for a brisk, invigorating walk; and as Sydney Durham took his accustomed way to the loch, he made sure that the young lady left all by herself in the inn would come abroad during the day, and that he would be able to make out her figure in the wide, white landscape. As for her promise to make her appearance at the big rock at lunch-time, she was virtually absolved from that by the departure of her father. Friendly as her disposition seemed to be, he could hardly expect her to keep that appointment. So, when he got down to the boat, he set to work to get his lines in order without much hope of any pleasant companionship when the mid-day halt should be called.

But fortune had something else in store for him this morning. He had just got out the lines, and was settling down to a placid contemplation of the snow-clad hills and the blue loch when a sudden vibration of the rod and a loud scream of the reel startled him into attention. He snatched at the one rod with his right hand, and with his left took up the other and passed it on to Duncan so that he might reel up and have the way clear. But the transference had not been completed when away went the line of the second rod with an

alarming shriek; and instantly the truth was flashed upon him that he had got a salmon on each of the lines. To say that there was joy in this discovery would be absolutely the reverse of the fact; there was bewilderment, agony, terror—anything but joy.

“Pull, Peter!” he yelled. “Pull into the shore! Look alive, man! Here, Duncan, you take this rod and jump out as soon as you can and get away from me as far as you can. My goodness, I hope they won’t cross the lines!”

Peter was pulling as if he would break his back; and as they fortunately happened to be opposite a little bay in which there was no ice, a few seconds sufficed to get the boat ashore; instantly Duncan jumped into the water, rod in hand, and ran away along the bank; then he suddenly stood stock still, staring in amazement and despair. The terrible discovery had been made by Sydney at the same moment—the fish had crossed the lines, and were tugging at each other: what mortal traces could bear this fearful strain?

The situation was appalling. Had Duncan been able to get the one rod taken away along the bank before the lines had crossed, the matter would have been simple enough; for

each fish could have been played separately and in safety, the one from the boat, the other from the bank; but, now that the lines had crossed, the two salmon were hauling at each other; while neither Sydney nor Duncan dared put the least pressure on them, for in that case they would only be increasing this already most perilous strain. But what was to be done? A more hopeless predicament could not be imagined; indeed, if it had not been agonising to the chief actor in the scene, it would have been ludicrous enough. There were the two salmon almost on the surface of the water, and in their struggles to get away from this entanglement they rolled over each other like a couple of pigs; in the boat was Sydney, holding a rod in his hand, and looking on, at once distracted and helpless; on the shore was Duncan, also holding a rod, and quite as helpless as his master. Only one thing was absolutely certain: this tugging of the two salmon against each other could not last many seconds longer; the strongest tackle must give before such violent usage.

“Well, I must chance it, Peter,” Sydney said; and therewith he sprang out of the boat and on to the bank. “Bring the gaff—if I

can't land them both upon the shore, they'll be off directly."

He called on Duncan to come nearer; and this the gillie did, reeling in as he came, and keeping almost a slack line, for the two fish, hopelessly intermixed, were practically being played by the one rod. Being played?—they were being landed! Sydney kept stepping back and back on the snow, with a deliberate and steady strain, risking everything on the strength of the gut. How and why neither of the lines cut the other, he could not understand; but still they held, as he towed the two salmon into the shallows, by main force. And then followed a bit of quick and lively action on the part of Peter. He sprang into the water, gaff in hand; with a sudden swoop, he got hold of the one fish and dragged him ashore, lines and all, and shook him off, then he jumped into the water again before the other fish floundering there could do any mischief, and him also he bore to bank on his victorious clip. It was a wild and most unscientific scrimmage; no one could tell exactly how it all occurred; but here, lying on the snow, were the two resplendent creatures—silvery, pale blue, and purple—and neither the

one nor the other of the traces had even been frayed!

“Well, that is a stroke of luck, Peter!” Sydney exclaimed, with considerable fervour. “I’ve had two salmon on once before, but never with crossed lines. I’ll send a testimonial to that tackle-maker, as sure as I’m alive; and he can print it in the *Fishing Gazette* if he likes.”

Well, now, fortune seemed to think she had shown him sufficient favour for one morning; for all the forenoon he industriously explored those winding bays, to no purpose. Then he went ashore for lunch. But nowhere in the white, silent landscape could he see any solitary figure approaching; of course not; she would expect him to understand that her promise had been cancelled. And what of the sketch without the group of figures at the big rock? He began to think he could make something out of such a day as this—a hard, clear, metallic sky; bold white clouds that were mirrored in a dull silvery-grey fashion on the ice; the blue, ruffled water; the snow of the moorlands quite of a warm hue in the sun; the colder tone of the far slopes of Ben Loyal and Ben Hee and Ben Hope. He would have two boats at the point, however; and a larger group of gillies;

but these were minor details; he seemed to be getting hold of a subject, as he sate, and smoked, and stared.

The afternoon brought that difficult dinner-question to the front again; and he began to ask himself, with an innumerable variety of doubts and hesitations and surmises, whether it was quite such an impossibility that Miss Anne should honour him with her company at the modest banquet which Mrs. Murray would send in. Surely a young lady could with perfect propriety enter the public-room of an inn and take her dinner there, no matter what the number of the other guests? Supposing that he and she dined in separate rooms, would not each know the arrangement to be the result of an absurd conventionalism, and would not each know that the other knew, and was thinking of it? What happiness it would be to find Miss Anne his sole companion at the dinner-table! For there would be no interruption to their talk; he would try to entertain her as best he could; and he would lead her on to speak of all her own experiences and opinions and plans which were of the greatest and deepest interest to him. Surely their dining separately would only be a stupid formalism?

At the same time he had an uneasy consciousness that that room was not entirely a public-room; and that a young lady could hardly be expected to come and dine in the private room of a comparative stranger, *sola cum solô*. When her father was there, they had taken their other meals in their own room. Indeed, Sydney surmised that Mr. Murray, the landlord, had simply assumed that three people, finding themselves thrown together in so remote a place, would naturally prefer to dine together; while no doubt Mrs. Murray had chosen his, Sydney's room, because it was nearer the kitchen. And here at last he began to see daylight. Would not the solution of this dark diplomatic difficulty finally rest with Mrs. Murray? If she thought Miss Hague might find it embarrassing to go into the quasi public-room for dinner, would not she tell the fair-haired Nelly that the young lady would dine in her own room? So that not on Miss Anne would lie the onus of refusal. She would not have to appear unfriendly. Both she and he would simply bow to the dictates of the worthy Mrs. Murray.

Nevertheless, when he got home to the inn that evening, and when he had thawed himself

before the comfortable fire he found in his bedroom, and changed his attire, it was with a considerable curiosity, perhaps with a little trepidation, that he went downstairs. The first swift glance at the table put an end to all his doubts, hopes, or fears. He was to dine alone. Miss Hague was remaining in her own room. It would be hard to say whether disappointment or some little feeling of relief was uppermost in his mind; at all events, it was not his business to protest; Mrs. Murray had settled that difficult question, and he was content.

Yet, as he sat at his solitary meal and thought of the poor lone prisoner in the other room, his heart was melted with pity; and he thought she could not be offended if he sent her a little message. So, when dinner was over, he said to the tall and fair-haired Highland lass who waited on him,

“Look here, Nelly, I wish you would take my compliments to Miss Hague, and say I caught two salmon this morning, and that I hope she will accept one of them to send to one of her friends. If she gives me the name and address, I will write the label, and see the fish sent off.”

Nelly went away and speedily returned.

"Miss Hague's compliments to you, sir, and she is ferry mich obliged, but she could not think to tek the fish from you, when there's so few of them whatever."

"Oh, but I insist. You tell her that, Nelly. She may send it to her father, if she likes; for her father sent that one of yesterday to somebody else."

Eventually, Miss Anne sent him her father's address, and also a very pleasant message of thanks; so that matter was settled aright. Then in the course of the evening, he began to think that all the illustrated papers (the only kind of periodical literature artists ever read) which were lying about, were in a state of sad confusion; so he set to work to sort them out, and arrange them, and put them into ship-shape. And again he summoned Nelly, and bade her take this bundle into Miss Hague's room, so that she might look at the pictures if she cared to do so; and again came a grateful message from the poor lone prisoner. All this was very pleasant; and he was glad to have even this remote kind of companionship established, even if lath and plaster walls intervened between him and her; but, as it turned out, they were not always to remain so isolated.

Next morning was Sunday. There was no church in this little hamlet, nor yet within many a long mile of it; so, when he had read for a while after breakfast, he got his cap and walking-stick and wandered forth into the silent world of snow. The weather was still hard and bright and clear; but the sunlight was almost hot; indeed, when he had got out into the moorland the warmth was sufficient to sweeten all the air with odours from the withered grass and heather. He went down to the Mudal, crossed the bridge, and made his way along to the shores of the loch. What was this strange whispering—this continuous, soft buzzing in the universal silence? At last he made it out. The loch was only partially frozen over; and where the sheet of ice ceased there was a fringe of broken fragments that the lapping water kept in constant motion, producing this curious murmur, the while the various corners and angles of the broken ice flashed millions of diamonds in the sun. On and on he went, idly, at peace with all the world, wishing no harm to any living creature. The curlews called their warning note as they wheeled and wheeled up to some higher slope; but they must have known he had no gun with

him. He started a white hare out of the wood near Morten's Bay; but she did not go far before she stopped, sat up on her haunches, cocked her ears, and stared at him. It is true an old grouse cock came whirring down towards him with a long angry cry that ended in a fierce crow of defiance, its eye bright and bold, its red comb resplendent; but he soon discovered the cause of all this martial display; from another knoll not far off came the answering note of the hen, but a very quiet and ordinary note, as if she were saying, "Oh, it's all right; don't make such a mighty fuss; do you think I can't take care of myself?" and then, with hardly a glance at the passing stranger, she calmly resumed her pecking at the seeds of the withered heather.

He spent all the morning wandering here and there along the shores of the loch; and about midday he thought he would return to the inn for some food. He met no one on the way back, as he had met no one on the way out, until, while he was yet some little distance from the bridge, he beheld a solitary figure coming along the Mudal valley. He looked again and again; he became more and more convinced that this must be Miss Hague; and as the two

roads converged at the bridge, at the bridge they were bound to meet. He arrived there first, it is true; but he made no scruple about waiting until she should come up; and, indeed, when she drew near, she greeted him with great frankness and without the slightest trace of embarrassment.

"What a beautiful day it is!" she said, as they walked on together to the inn. "It is so strange to feel the hot sunlight, and yet to find every pool frozen over. But I suppose there must be some melting, for you can hear the trickling of the water underneath. What a lonely place this is! I have been away up that glen for miles, and have not seen a living thing except a hare—at least I suppose it was a hare, though it looked much more like a white cat."

"And it must be particularly lonely for you," said he, "even in the inn, since your father left."

"Yes, it is a little," she made answer, cheerfully enough; "but I always carry plenty of books with me, wherever I go; and then it was very kind of you to lend me those illustrated papers. I found them extremely interesting in a place like this—they seemed to show you all

that was going on in a world out of which you had come altogether."

"Well, you know, Miss Hague, you mustn't think that Inver-mudal is always like this in March," he was proceeding to say, by way of apologising for the [weather, when she interrupted him.

"Oh, but I like it!" she said. "I like the solitariness, and the wildness, and the snow. It suits me perfectly. I don't know that papa quite bargained for it."

"Of course not," he said. "This is quite exceptional. The common fault of Inver-mudal in the spring is its summer-like weather—from the fisherman's point of view, that is; you go down to the loch every day only to find it getting lower and lower, the water a sheet of glass, and you with nothing to do but sit on the gunwale of the boat and kick your heels in the sand."

"I'm afraid salmon-fishing isn't a good thing for an artist," she said, with a smile. "Doesn't it rather tend to idleness?"

"Meaning me?" he said, contentedly. "Well, I start work to-morrow."

"Where?" she asked.

"I am going to take the subject you sug-

gested—the bay at the big rock, with the boats and gillies.”

“Oh, indeed,” she said; and then she continued in the most frank and off-hand way: “Would you mind if I came down during the day to see how you were getting on?”

The very simplicity of this proposal somewhat took him aback; it was a far more friendly concession on her part than he could have dreamed of asking from her.

“I should be delighted,” he said. “I shall be looking forward to your coming all the morning.”

“You see,” she explained, “I want to go and have a look at the Pictish fort I have heard so much about; and I suppose I must go along by that side of the loch. If I may, I will come down to the big rock in passing, just to make sure that you have not been tempted to go away after the salmon again.”

He was just about to say, “Why not come at lunch-time?” but he dared not; surely it was enough that all of her own free will she was about to pay him a little visit? Indeed, he was very grateful to her for this mark of interest in him and his pursuits, though little did he dream of what was to come of that chance ramble to the Pictish fort.

CHAPTER IV.

A RESCUE.

ENVELOPED in a mighty ulster of Harris homespun, Sydney Durham was seated before his easel, down by the loch-side; and with a light, firm, and practised hand he was transferring to the upright block the chief features of this wide landscape—the silver-grey ice, the blue, lapping water beyond, the farther shores now showing something of russet and gold through the melting of the snow, and the far peaks of the northern mountains rising white into a steel-bright sky. This was but a sketch, a memento; perhaps at some future time he might take up the subject and make a serious picture of it; perhaps the sketch would remain a sketch—in the portfolio of a friend. Anyhow he was succeeding in getting a very fair and honest transcript of the scene before him when he discovered that Miss Hague, true to her promise, was coming along through the snow to pay him a visit; whereupon he rose and put aside his painting implements, and began to stamp his feet and clap his hands in order to get some blood into them.

"Yes," said Miss Anne, as she came along, her bright young face smiling from over that boa of thick white fur. "I should think you found it cold work."

"Not much colder than sitting in the boat," said he. "But if I get this thing finished in time, I mean to have a turn round the loch, to see if I can't pick up another salmon for you to send to one of your friends."

She went forward to see the "thing" of which he seemed to speak rather contemptuously; and in her modest way she said that to her at least it appeared just admirable. Nothing could be more vivid and life-like, she declared. Now, praise from the lips of a very pretty and engaging young woman ought to have been sweet to the ears of a young man; but perhaps Sydney took a truer estimate of the value of this rough pictorial memorandum; at all events he drew her attention away from it by beginning to speak of the Pictish fort whither she was bound.

"There is one thing," said he, "if you want to explore the passages between the walls—you know there are double walls all the way round, whatever they were meant for—well, if you want to creep in and explore, you need have no

fear of snakes at this time of year. It's a rare place for adders in the summer. But I dare say you will find it too cold and wet to go in on hands and knees; I've never been in myself."

"Mr. Durham," said she, very prettily, "won't you please go on with your work? then I shouldn't think I was interrupting you."

She was not hurrying away, then? Out of her frank good-nature had she come down to the loch-side to cheer him with a few minutes' companionship and talk? He needed no second invitation. Instantly he took to his task again; and as he sat down he resumed the conversation, that she should have no excuse for going away at once.

"I have been trying curling this morning," said he, as he took up his palette and brushes, "to keep myself warm."

"Curling?" she said, doubtfully.

"It is a Scotch game," he explained—"played on the ice. Do you see the bottle away out yonder? I managed to send it so far, and I have been trying to reach it with stones."

"I suppose I couldn't reach it," she observed, with a glance at the bottle that lay far out on the frozen sheet of water.

"You might try—it is a capital exercise," he said, encouragingly, as he was working away. "But I don't know how it is that women never can throw a stone."

"Why, that is simple enough," said she; "it is merely because they never wished to learn. It is one of many accomplishments they prefer to leave to men. A woman sometimes grows a moustache; but she isn't proud of it."

Nevertheless, Miss Anne made several desperate efforts to reach the small target, and all in vain; she was as awkward at throwing a stone as any woman ever born; then, as she gave up, he sought to detain her by talking of something else, no matter what.

"Do you skate, Miss Hague?" he said, at a venture.

"No, I have never tried," she answered.

"It isn't often that Loch Naver is frozen over," he continued; "there are too many squalls about. But they say it has sometimes been frozen so hard that the deer have crossed from Clebrig to the other side. Have you seen any deer yet?"

"No, not one," she made answer, "though I have been watching everywhere when I have been out walking."

"In very cold weather," said he, most imprudently, "they sometimes come into the wood beyond the Pictish fort"—imprudently, for at the mention of the Pictish fort, she seemed to remember her purpose in coming out.

"Perhaps I may be more fortunate to-day," said Miss Anne. "So I will bid you good-bye for the present. I am glad to see you have got on so well."

Whereupon she was gone; and he was left alone with his work, in which he seemed to take less interest now. Mechanically he went on with it, it is true; but his thoughts were wandering away along the shores of this solitary loch, to the old tower built out on the wooded promontory, its rude, uncemented walls rising high above the scattered birch and hazels. Would she have been grievously offended if he had offered to be her guide? This sketch, now, seemed to have in it all he would probably want. He had not proposed to carry it much further. It was a first impression, as it were; it dealt only with broad and general effects; he had had no intention of going into detail. When lunch-time came, he had convinced himself that he had done enough;

and that simple meal over, he put together his painting gear and placed it where he could pick it up on the way home; and then he and the gillies got into the boat, and the trolling for salmon began.

"But, look here, Duncan," he said, as soon as the lines were out, "I think we make a great mistake in always keeping to the upper end of the loch; the consequence is it gets fished to death. We ought to try further down the sides. Nobody ever thought of going down to Morten's Bay until Mr. Morten found again and again that he could sneak a fish out of that bay when every other place was hopeless. Why shouldn't we go away down by the Pictish fort, and have a try there?"

"Oh, ferry well, sir; we will chist do that," Duncan said, readily enough; and presently the boat had altered its course and was making towards the east.

As they slowly rowed away down the loch, it was not the salmon-rods that chiefly claimed his attention, it was rather the lonely shores they were passing. There is no path along this side of Loch Naver; and he knew it would take Miss Anne some time ere she made her way across the rough moorland and through

the birch woods to the ruins of the ancient fort ; anyhow, wherever she might be, she would surely see the boat, and she would know that he had finished work for the day. Did she want any information about that curious hill of stones ?—she had but to come down to the loch-side and call to him, and he would willingly go ashore. Was there a chance of her being tired by this rough walk over the drifted snow and heather ? Well, she had but to summon the boat, and gladly would he have her rowed up to the head of the lake. Indeed, so pre-occupied was Mr. Sydney Durham at this moment that he procured for himself a smartly cut finger, as it chanced ; for a fish having bolted away with one of the minnows, the young man thoughtlessly snatched at the rod with his hand over the line ; and the line, running out at an inconceivable speed, left a mark on his forefinger that remained there for many a day thereafter. However, he eventually got the salmon—a game little fish of eight or nine pounds, that quite exhausted himself with his first rushes and plunges, and allowed himself to be captured rather under a quarter of an hour.

And after all they had to pass Miss Anne

without her observing them. The ancient and ruined stronghold stands on a promontory that becomes an island when the loch is high; and Sydney guessed that she would have some difficulty in getting across the connecting neck of land, what with the broken stones and the ice. In fact, she was carefully picking her steps as they went by at some distance from her; and she was too much occupied to notice them. The next he saw of her was when the boat had got some way past the tower; and then he perceived that she had climbed right to the top of the ruins, for the small mite of a figure was black against the clear sky. Then she disappeared; and he took it for granted that she was exploring the interior of this mysterious building, and that she would soon set out again on her return to the inn.

With the exception of the small fish they had got on the way down, these bays yielded them nothing; and Duncan and Peter were directed to put the boat round again and get back to the head of the loch; so that once again they would go by the ruined tower. It was not until they had passed it and were some distance off that Sydney noticed that

Miss Hague—whose figure had been hidden by some birch-trees—was now down near the shore, and, as he fancied, was waving a handkerchief to him. Well, that was a very friendly greeting, and he returned it. Of course he did not take his eyes away from her; and he was considerably surprised to observe that she repeated the signal.

“Wait a minute, Duncan,” said he. “I think Miss Hague wants us to go ashore.”

He hesitated, it is true; for if he were to misinterpret a merely passing salute into an invitation from the young lady to join her, that would be a very awkward thing: on the other hand, did not the repeated signal mean something? What suddenly brought him to a decision was the recollection that soon his minnows would be aground; so instantly he gave one of the rods to Duncan to reel up, while he himself reeled up the other. They were going ashore.

The men ran the bow of the boat into a little creek, and he sprang out and made his way over the big blocks of stone that time and the weather had hurled down from the walls of the fort; and when he drew near to her, he said:

"I beg your pardon, Miss Hague, but did you want me?—I fancied you might want me, perhaps——"

"I am sorry to trouble you," she said, "but—but could you take me with you in your boat? I have hurt my foot. I am afraid I can't walk back to the inn."

"Oh, of course I will!" he said, eagerly. "But it isn't anything serious, is it? I ought to have warned you about all those loose blocks of stone, and then the snow covering them——" Even as he spoke he noticed the odd, constrained look of her face: moreover, she was holding on by one hand to the branch of a tree. "Can you make your way down to the boat, do you think?"

"Give me your hand, please, and I will try."

He took her hand firmly in his, and kicked away the snow from the stone on which she was to step. She attempted to move forward, but at the same instant a swift expression of pain shot across her features, and she clutched at the branch of the tree again.

"No—I—I can't put my foot to the ground, and—I suppose I have twisted my ankle; but the pain may go away by-and-by. Don't let

me detain you, Mr. Durham. I can't get down to the boat, and that's the fact."

"I am not going to leave you until I see you safely into the inn," said he, warmly. "You have sprained your foot badly, that's about what it is; and do you think I am going to leave you here? Not likely! I'll tell you what we must do. It is no use rowing you up to the head of the loch, for then you would have a mile and a half between you and the inn; we will row you over to the other side, for there is a good road there, and one of my gillies will go along to Mr. Murray and get some kind of vehicle sent for you at once."

"I am so sorry to give you so much trouble," she said.

"Do you know that a bad sprain is a very serious thing," said he, almost reproachfully, "and should be seen to without a moment's delay? I consider myself very lucky to have been within call of you when this happened. Well, now, if you can't put your foot to the ground—and I wouldn't try it, if I were you; you may only be doing more damage—as you can't put your foot to the ground, I must carry you down to the boat."

She started somewhat; but she said nothing; and somehow, at the same moment, there flashed upon him the fancy that he could get her conveyed to the boat in a fashion that would embarrass her less.

"Or I'll tell you what will be better," said he, "I'll get those two sturdy fellows to come up, and you'll put a hand on a shoulder of each of them, and they'll carry you down as if you were sitting in an easy-chair. Won't that be better?"

"Yes," said she, with averted eyes.

"For they're more used to the rocks than I am," he explained, "and we mustn't risk any further accident. Hi, Duncan, Peter!" he called to the two gillies, "come along here!"

The two men came quickly up; and very soon Miss Anne was being conveyed, with the greatest care, down to the boat, where she was as carefully deposited in the stern. Sydney was most attentive to her in every possible way, and she thanked him with mute and grateful glances. Then, as the gillies pulled away across the loch, Duncan was being instructed as to what he should do when they reached the other side. He was to make off

for the inn at his best speed; Mr. Murray was to dispatch a trap without delay to carry the young lady home. If any one knew where Doctor Douglas—whose parochial duties carried him over a wide extent of country—was to be found, he was to be summoned forthwith. Mrs. Murray was to have bandages and liniments ready. A big fire was to be built up in Miss Hague's room. The most comfortable couch or sofa in the house was to be carried thither, and so forth.

"Really, Mr. Durham," Miss Anne said, with a smile, "you are giving yourself far too much trouble. What is a sprain!"

"If you had lived as long as I have," said this ancient and experienced person, "and knocked about as much, you would know what mischief may arise from a sprain. I consider myself responsible for this accident, and I shan't leave anything undone until I see you quite recovered from the effects of it."

"You responsible?" said she, with wide eyes.

"Yes, certainly," he said. "I should have warned you of those ankle-breaking stones. They're bad enough in summer, as I found when I went hobbling over them; but in winter, when they are half concealed by snow,

they are a hundred times worse. And supposing I had not happened to come down that way in the boat—supposing I had not happened to notice your signal?”

“I had contemplated that possibility,” said she, pleasantly enough; “and I knew quite well what was before me. I should simply have had to remain there, clinging on to that tree, until dusk fell; and then, Mrs. Murray, getting alarmed, and knowing where I had gone, would have sent some one to look for me. But how fortunate it was that you happened to come fishing down that way.”

“Yes, it was,” he said; and then glancing at her with a little diffidence, he confessed the truth. “The fact is, it wasn’t entirely the fishing that took me down there—not altogether. I went on the off-chance of your wanting to know something about the fort; or you might be tired, I thought, and might prefer being rowed home.”

“It was very kind of you,” she responded, with downcast eyes; and nothing more was said upon that subject, for they were now nearing the shore.

As soon as they had landed, Duncan set off at a trot for the inn; but Miss Anne was

counselled to remain where she was, and, of course, Sydney stopped by the boat to keep her company. He was infinitely more anxious about this injury than she was; indeed, her cheerfulness convinced him more than ever that women can bear pain with far greater fortitude than men; even apart from the actual suffering of the moment, she seemed to look forward to the solitary confinement in her own room with perfect equanimity.

"If the doctor says I must not try to move about for a week or two, I know what I shall do," Miss Anne observed to the young man, to whom she spoke quite frankly and simply. "I shall send for a young lady who was governess to my sister's children for some time, and who has gone as travelling-companion with me on several occasions. She is an exceedingly nice girl, clever, good-humoured, a capital companion; and we shall be able to pass the time somehow, with sewing, reading, chatting, playing chess——"

"Oh, do you play chess?" said he, quickly—so quickly and eagerly that she looked up with a little surprise. Did *he* expect to be able to dissipate the monotony of the poor invalid's seclusion in that fashion?

"I am very fond of it, at all events," she said; and then she went on and told him a great deal more about Miss Ennerby, who appeared to have been much more the young lady's friend than her paid travelling-companion.

"For you see, Mr. Durham," she continued, in her frankly communicative way, "if papa goes to Lisbon, I don't know how long he may have to remain. His late partner's widow lives there, and she is a helpless kind of woman, who is always getting into trouble with her two boys; and papa is supposed to look after all her affairs. So there is a possibility of his not coming back here at all, and in that case he would want me to return to London at once; and if Miss Ennerby were to come up here now, she could go back with me, and it would be pleasanter for the two of us to be travelling together."

"Returning to London at once?" he mechanically repeated to himself. This was no joyful prospect for Mr. Sydney Durham, who had set such store by this new acquaintanceship—this friendship?—begun in these far northern wilds. It was the very remoteness of the place—it was their isolation from all the rest of the world—that seemed to set an enduring seal on their

intimacy. He and she were getting to know each other so well! And was she to be suddenly spirited away just as this gracious companionship was growing more and more delightful?

There was a distant, hushed sound of wheels on the snow. He went a few yards up the bank, so that he could look along the road.

"Well, this is a stroke of luck!" he exclaimed, as he returned to the boat. "They have found Dr. Douglas at home, and he is coming now in his own pony-chaise. He must just have returned from one of his rounds."

"Why everything is happening fortunately for me!" she said, brightly.

"Oh, do you think so?" he said, in reply; but none the less did he wonder—with a young man's wonder—at her resolute courage and cheerfulness.

The big, corpulent, good-humoured-looking doctor came tramping down through the snow as soon as Duncan had gone to the pony's head; and, of course, when the examination of the young lady's foot was going forward, Sydney stood aside. But presently he heard that this was nothing but a sprain—no bones were broken; and when the ankle had been care-

fully bandaged, the big doctor called upon Peter, who was standing by, to help him to carry the young lady up to the pony-chaise, in which she was soon on her way to Inver-mudal, Sydney and his two gillies returned to the boat; but he did not care about further fishing this afternoon. They pulled away along the loch, picked up his painting implements, landed at the head, and then, with the salmon they had got some time before, they all set out for the inn.

The doctor had just completed a more thorough treatment of the injured limb, and was coming away, when he encountered Sydney.

"Well, what is the report?" the younger man asked.

"I fear it is rather a bad sprain," the doctor said. "But I shall look round again to-morrow morning—on my way to Croick—and see how it looks then. Absolute rest, of course, is the first consideration."

"Yes; but see here, doctor," Sydney said forthwith, "she tells me that at any moment her father may write to her summoning her to go south at once."

"Well, then, she can't go south at once," the doctor said, in his easy, good-natured fashion;

“no, nor for some time to come, unless she is a very wilful and imprudent young lady, and she does not seem to be that.”

“Have you told her she must not think of going?” the younger man said, rather anxiously.

“Not I; I heard nothing about it. But she knows she must not attempt to put her foot to the ground, so she is not likely to try a drive into Lairg and then a railway journey to London—at least for a while. It’s no use playing tricks with a sprained ankle, unless you want to have it come back again and again.”

“How is Mrs. Douglas, doctor?” was the next question.

“Very well indeed, thank ye.”

“And Mrs. Strang?”

“First-rate. She and her two children are coming to stay with us in the autumn for a while, for her husband is going over to the States with those American friends of his, to have a look at the country, I suppose.”

But it was not of Mrs. Douglas, nor yet of Mrs. Ronald Strang, that Sydney Durham was thinking at this moment. He was considering the necessity of his seeking out Mrs. Murray. Mrs. Murray was a person of experience and authority. It was for Mrs. Murray now to

impress on the ingenuous mind of Miss Anne the folly, the madness, nay, the wilful wickedness of any young lady who would think of undertaking a railway journey, while there was the remotest chance of her still further damaging an ankle already seriously injured.

CHAPTER V.

A GAME OF CHESS.

ALL that night it blew hard; such doors as had been left open slammed and banged; the wind howled in the chimneys; and in the morning when Sydney, on opening his eyes, perceived a curious glare shining along the ceiling, he knew quite well what had happened—another snow-storm was raging outside. When he went to the window it seemed as if the solitary little inn was more than ever cut off from the rest of the world by this wild bewilderment of snow—snow whirling through the air in gusts and eddies, snow lying thick on the fairy-like trees and on the bits of bushes in the garden, snow turning the broad highway into a trackless path of white. Beyond that nothing was visible. Clebrig had dis-

appeared. The air was obscure with the heavy flakes, that swept hither and thither with the changeful squalls.

The life of a parish doctor in a sparsely-populated portion of the Highlands is not an enviable one. Here was Dr. Douglas, unable to drive, setting out for Croick on his pony, and, according to his promise, he called on his way to see how Miss Anne was getting on. When he had visited his patient, he came along to the room in which Sydney was having breakfast.

"Your young lady friend is in a sad predicament," said he.

"How, then?" the young man asked in some alarm.

"The mail has just brought her a letter from her father," the big doctor said, as he went to the fire, and held out his hands and rubbed them briskly. "He is called away somewhere; he does not expect to be back here at all. His daughter is to pack up, make sufficient compensation to Mr. Murray for leaving his rooms empty, and set off for London at once."

"But she can't!" the young man exclaimed, in dismay.

"That's just what I've been telling her," said the doctor, drily. "She can't. What's more, she'll be a very ill-advised young lady if she attempts anything of the kind for a very considerable time to come. She must have wrenched her foot dreadfully on those stones——"

"And of course you insisted on her not thinking of such a thing!" Sydney broke in, impetuously.

"There was no need," Dr. Douglas said, with much good-humour. "She can't go, whether she wishes or not. And there's another reason why she may as well give up all notion of following her father's instructions. If this storm continues, and it looks as if it would, the roads will be impassable. I fancy the mail-car that came through this morning is the last we'll see for some time; the driver told me there were already deep drifts at Croick. Well, I'll have to take the road. The old mare will have the wind with her getting down to Croick, but she'll have to face a bitter blast coming back to-night—that is, if we do come back to-night. Good morning, Mr. Durham; I fear ye'll have a cold day on the loch."

"I say," the young man interposed, as he

accompanied the doctor to the door, "don't you think it will be something dreadful for Miss Hague to be shut up in that room all by herself? Couldn't she be taken into Mrs. Murray's parlour, where she would have the children to talk to, or, if she liked, I would go in now and again and have a chat with her, and try to cheer her up a bit? You know she's never been in the Highlands before, she is not used to the loneliness."

"I think she would rather stay in her own room," the doctor said, as he tightened the muffler round his throat; "but she won't be all by herself for long. She has sent off a telegram by the mail for some friend of hers—a lady companion, I believe—who will come along at once, and perhaps get through before the roads are blocked. But there would be no harm in your sending in a message of inquiry now and again, just to let her know she was among friends."

"Oh, of course I will do that!" Sydney said. "And books—and—and illustrated newspapers—and my portfolio of sketches—perhaps she would like to look at that."

"I dare say she would," observed the doctor; but, good-humoured as he was, he did not care to

converse any longer about this not very serious case, especially as he had the long ride to Croick before him; so again he bade the younger man good morning, and went forth into the snow.

To tell the truth, Sydney Durham would very much have preferred to hang about the house all day and invent a series of covert little attentions to be paid to that hapless prisoner; but his gillies would not let him. They maintained that a snowstorm was "chist a gran' time for the salmon;" so somewhat unwillingly he wrapped up his neck, put on his waterproof, slouched his hat down over his ears, and, accompanied by the gillies, set out for the loch. It did seem a mad undertaking, he had to confess to himself; while the unpleasantness of it was unmistakable. The snow and sleet smote him sharply about the face; the bitter wind pierced him to the bone; and ere he had got half-way along the road he was so encrusted with powdered ice that he would have made an admirable presentment of old Father Christmas. Indeed, getting down to the loch, after they had left the highway, was no joke; for the driven snow was now banking itself up in wreaths; and sometimes he stumbled into one of these up to the thighs, while his eyes

were so blinded by the sleet that he could with difficulty make out the margin of the frozen burn alongside which he was making his way. Even the gillies had to admit that there might be too much of a snow-storm for salmon-fishing. When at last they reached the loch-side, they found the black water driving by before the gale, so that it was quite hopeless to think of putting out a boat on it. Disconsolately, Sydney sat down on the gunwale, turning his back to the wind, and huddling himself up as best he might. What a picture for a landscape-painter to sit and contemplate! He could have thrown a stone as far as he could see. There was nothing at all visible but the bit of slaty beach at his feet; then a space of heath from which the wind was tearing the finely-powdered snow into whirling white smoke; and beside him the lashing black water, curling and hissing with dirty foam. The vast bulk of Clebrig, that ought to have been right before him, had departed, and in its place was an expanse of dull, cold white, against which the bigger of the falling flakes were opaquely grey. And meanwhile he was himself becoming more thickly caked with ice, that broke and fell off in lumps when he chanced to move.

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The two gillies sate and silently stared at the stones at their feet; sometimes they tried to light a pipe. Their master sate and stared at the black and driven water, or amused himself by taking cakes of ice from off his coat. Did he chance to reflect that at that very time he might have been at the Arts Club in Hanover Square, in a comfortable easy-chair before the fire, reading one of Mr. Besant's novels, and knowing that lunch-time would bring in many friends and companions who might be induced to join in a game of pool during the afternoon?

"Duncan, this is no use at all!" he called out, after long and weary watching had given place to blank despair.

"'Deed, no mich," said Duncan.

"If we tried to put the boat on the loch, we'd be driven to the other side in a couple of minutes!"

"Ay, chist that," Duncan said, with equanimity.

"I believe the storm is getting worse instead of better!"

"I'm thinking that too, sir."

"Very well," said Mr. Durham, very slowly, and beginning to shake off the cakes of ice and

snow, "I am going home ; you can bring the rods."

"Ferry well, sir."

The storm did not abate all that afternoon ; but next morning the wind had lessened ; and during the following day or two there were bursts of clear sky and sunlight that lit up the silent white world and caused Loch Naver to shine as with a summer blue. During all this time Sydney had not ceased to keep up communication with the forlorn imprisoned damsel, his confidential agent and go-between being the Highland lass Nelly. Everything that constant thoughtfulness could suggest was done for the poor lone prisoner ; and many were the messages of gratitude that Nelly had to bring back to him in return. Once, indeed, he had ventured into the room himself, and was not rebuked for his temerity. The occasion was this. He had with him a small portfolio of sketches he had made while travelling in County Galway ; and when he had sent her all the books and magazines and illustrated papers he could lay his hands on, he thought it might amuse her to look over this little collection of painter's memoranda. But when he brought down this portfolio from among his other traps, and rang the

bell for Nelly to take it in to the young lady, there was no answer to the summons; then he remembered he had seen Nelly go up the road a few minutes before, apparently on her way to the keeper's cottage; accordingly he took the sketches in his hand, and made bold to carry them along himself. He knew the room well enough—it used to be his own private parlour. He knocked at the door. “Come in,” said a voice that he recognised; the next moment he caught sight of Miss Anne, who was lying on a sofa, her head propped up, reading. She looked up quickly—and certainly with a little surprise.

“Oh, Miss Hague,” said he, “I can’t find Nelly about—and I’ve got a portfolio of sketches here that I thought you might care to look over—shall I leave them with you?”

“Oh, thank you very much,” said she, most pleasantly. “But indeed you have been far too kind, Mr. Durham. I hope Nelly has told you how grateful I am to you for thinking of me.”

“Surely it was the very least that any one could do,” said he, while he still remained standing at the door, with his hand on the handle, “considering how you are shut up here alone, without a single friend or acquaintance.”

“Why, I have a whole houseful of friends around me!” said Miss Anne, in her cheerful fashion. “How could I be more comfortable? Nelly keeps a blazing fire always burning; Mrs. Murray looks in from time to time to see how I am getting on; and here you have been sending me things continually, and thinking of me, until I was quite ashamed to be so much trouble.”

“I wish I could do more,” said he, as he went forward and put the portfolio on the table, and then retreated to the door again. “I’ll leave them for you to look over at your leisure. I’m afraid you’ll find them very rough things—mere jottings, in fact—but the costumes are picturesque—the red homespun of the Galway women is invaluable in a landscape.” He paused for a second, not quite knowing how to escape from this situation, or whether he should try to escape, or whether he had properly expressed sympathy with this poor prisoner. “If there’s anything else,” he said in a sort of desperation, “you can think of what I can get for you, I wish you would send word by Nelly.”

“Thank you so much!” said she, and her eyes expressed as much as her words. “After to-day I hope to be a little less helpless—that

is to say, if Miss Ennerby comes to-morrow. How are the roads now, Mr. Durham? Have you heard?"

"Well, you know," said he, "for the last two or three days the mail-cars haven't been running; they have brought the bags on horseback. I fancy there are bad drifts about Croick."

"I know that Bess will get through if anybody can," Miss Hague said, with a smile. "She is a most indomitable traveller."

There was a pause of half a second.

"Don't be in any hurry to return the sketches," he said. "Good afternoon, Miss Hague!"

"Good afternoon!—it is so very kind of you!" was her reply, as he gently shut the door behind him.

And presently he was in his own room, a little breathless and bewildered, and eagerly going over every incident and phrase of this momentous interview. No, he convinced himself, he had not been properly sympathetic at all. He had blundered and stumbled along like a helpless fool. Why had he not considered beforehand what he should say? He had not even asked how the injured foot was getting

on. He had not told her how anxious he was to be of service to her. He had not even hinted that all the day long he was thinking of how he might lessen the rigour of her captivity. What would she think of him—standing awkward and embarrassed at the door, unable to offer a single word of condolence to the poor invalid?

And then he strove to reassure himself. It had never occurred to him to treat her as an invalid because she was far from having the appearance of one. He had never seen her look more bright, happy, and cheerful: what was there in her condition to demand any formal expression of sympathy? And as for his anxious desire to be of service to her, surely she would understand all that? Surely she did understand, or what was the meaning of the gratitude so plainly written in her expressive eyes? No; he was rather glad he had taken the occasion of Nelly's absence to make that little visit. It was something to have seen Miss Anne again, to have spoken with her, to have the vision of her he carried about in his mind corrected and drawn with firmer outlines and warmer touches of colour. Her face had been in shadow, it is true; but the back of her

head was towards the window; and the glare coming from the snow-world outside made a wonder of her hair—a kind of aureole, as it were. And even in the shadow her eyes could tell their tale.

This young man was getting into a bad way. He abandoned his salmon-fishing altogether; he neglected to seek for subjects for his brush; he hung about the inn, devising little messages and attentions that would keep him in Miss Anne's mind. And thus it was that, on the day following the interview described above, when a light Stanhope phaeton drove up to the door, he was the only one in the house to notice its arrival. This was an unusual hour; no one was expecting any vehicle: and the phaeton had come noiselessly through the snow. But when Sydney perceived that the new-comer was a lady, he guessed that this was Miss Ennerby, and instantly he snatched up his cap and went to the door. She was just alighting from the phaeton: the glimpse he got of her showed a rather nice-looking young woman of about eight-and-twenty, with a grave face that was also refined and pleasant, and alert grey eyes.

“Miss Ennerby?” he said, raising his cap.

She turned with a quick look.

"Yes."

"The landlord will be here presently, no doubt," said Sydney, in his politest manner: "and if you like I will show you Miss Hague's room at once—you must be very cold. The man will bring in your things."

"Thank you," said she; and without more ado she followed him away along the passages leading to the wing of the inn.

"I suppose you had some difficulty in getting through?" he ventured to ask.

"Indeed, we had," she said. "We had to leave the road again and again, and the jolting over the moorland was pretty rough."

"Miss Hague said if any one could get through, you would," said this astute young man, who had his reasons for wishing to ingratiate himself with "Bess." Then he tapped at the door; "Come in!" was the answer; and when he had shown Miss Ennerby into the room, he retired discreetly, without any further intervention.

In the afternoon, to his surprise, and delight, he received a visit from Miss Ennerby. He was standing at the window of his room, looking out on the white landscape, and smoking; but very quickly did he whip that pipe away

when he saw who this was who had come to the door.

"Miss Hague's compliments," said "Bess," and she seemed to regard the young man with some kind of interest, "and would you be kind enough to tell her whether there is any chance of her getting a chess-board and chess-men, if she sent in to Lairg by the letter-carrier to-morrow morning?"

He paused for a moment.

"Lairg?" said he. "They keep most things there, but not chess-men, I fancy. However, that is of no account; will you tell Miss Hague, with my compliments, that I shall get her something that will do instead—in the course of an hour or so?"

Miss Ennerby thanked him and withdrew; and forthwith he set to work to improvise the materials for a game of chess. He got a sheet of Bristol board about double the size of a chess-board; and that he divided into the proper number of squares, painting each alternate one a deep lilac. He got another sheet, and cut that into the number of pieces required; and then he proceeded to sketch, in colour, on each bit of board, the piece it represented—kings, queens, bishops, knights, and castles, along

with the humble necessary pawns—the one set being rose-red, the other pale orange. And when all this was done, he did not ring for Nelly; he took the whole apparatus with him, and went along the passage, and presented himself at Miss Hague's room.

Miss Hague and her companion had just been having tea; a small table was drawn in by the side of the couch.

"I've got a kind of make-shift here," said he. "I don't know whether it will do; perhaps it will be better than nothing."

Miss Ennerby removed the tea-things; Sydney displayed his improvised chess-board and his coloured pieces; and Miss Anne was quite charmed.

"Why," she said, "you must be a chess-player yourself, or you couldn't have drawn the pièces so well."

There was a pause. Which of them was going to challenge the other to play? They both meant the same thing; but who was to say it? "Bess" said it.

"You know, Miss Anne," she put in, "you always beat me; and it's no fun for either you or me. Perhaps, you won't find it so easy with Mr. Durham."

"Oh, you will beat me easily," Sydney said to Miss Anne, as he rather nervously proceeded to draw in a chair; "but then I don't mind being beaten."

He didn't mind being beaten! Why, he wanted to be beaten! He wanted to be pounded, thrashed, exterminated—anything that would give her pleasure. He would have made all her pawns queens; he would have lent to her bishops the leaping powers of knights; he would have allowed her to castle out of check—anything, everything, as long as he was to have the entrancement of sitting near her—only this trumpery little table between them—so near that if a single hair had got out of its place on her smooth, pale forehead, he could have noticed it. What did he care about bishops and castles, when he could look at her small white hand moving over the board—a small white hand innocent of any ring! He forgot the existence of "Bess." She was in the room, doubtless, somewhere. Perhaps she was sewing; perhaps she was looking out of the window at the wild and wintry landscape, and wondering what could have brought any decent Christian folk to such a place. Meanwhile, Sydney was skilfully marshalling his

forces so as to secure his own defeat, until a protest from Miss Anne—"Mr. Durham, what are you doing? Look at your queen!" warned him that he must not play the traitor in too open a manner. Finally he was completely conquered, to his own exceeding joy; for immediately he said he must have his revenge, and to that she cheerfully assented. The result was that they played right on until dinner-time, when the arrival of the fair-haired Nelly drove him forth from this paradise to his own solitary little room.

This was but a beginning; Miss Ennerby, who had clear and shrewd grey eyes, thought she could foresee the end.

CHAPTER VI.

AN AIDER AND ABETTOR.

SUNDAY morning came and brought him a message from Miss Anne: would Mr. Durham be so kind as to come along to her room for a few minutes—she wished to beg a favour from him? Mr. Durham obeyed the summons with the most joyful alacrity: the favour was already granted, no matter what it might be.

He found Miss Anne, as usual, propped up on the sofa; Miss Ennerby had risen from her book and gone to the window.

"Now, Mr. Durham," the quasi-invalid said, after morning greetings had been exchanged, "I know we take up far too much of your time—I am always reproaching myself with it—and then selfishly forgetting the very next minute. However, to-day is different; to-day you can't go either painting or fishing; and so I am going to ask you to do me a favour. Miss Ennerby hasn't been out of the house since she came up, and of course that's very bad for her, never to be out in the fresh air. I fancy she is afraid of this wild place, and daren't venture away from the inn by herself. Mr. Durham, would you be so kind as to take her out and show her something of the neighbourhood?"

"I shall be delighted," said he forthwith.

"Here, Bess," the young lady called. "Put on your things; and Mr. Durham will take you down to the bridge over the Mudal and show you the various roads, so that at any time you may go for a walk without losing yourself on the moor."

"But to leave you alone, Miss Anne——?" said "Bess," by way of mild protest.

"I want to be left alone," the young lady rejoined, peremptorily; and that settled the matter: Miss Ennerby departed to get her bonnet and ulster, while Sydney went to wait for her at the door of the inn.

At first, when these two set forth, 'Bess' seemed a little bit shy; and a kind of occult, demure amusement appeared to hover about her face, as if she were conscious that this good-looking and pleasant-tempered young man would much rather be walking with the mistress than with the maid. But Sydney paid no heed to such things; he was rejoiced to have an opportunity of a long and confidential chat with one who was so intimately acquainted with Miss Anne; for it need hardly be said that that was the topic they simultaneously hit on, before they had left the inn-door a dozen yards behind them. And what did he not hear of Miss Anne's gentleness and kindness, her tolerance of other people's irascibility, her good-humour in travelling, her thoughtfulness and consideration for those around her, her indomitable cheerfulness and courage? They walked away down to the Mudal—over the hard, crisp snow—on this brilliant sunlit morning—and still 'Bess' was talking of Miss Anne, who

seemed to be to her much more of a friend than an employer ; they came to the point at which the roads diverge to Betty-hill, to Tongue, and to Durness, and still Miss Anne, and her sweet temper, and her generous disposition, and all her other wonderful qualities were being eulogised ; as they turned to skirt the shores of Loch Naver, this faithful and loyal companion, admirer, and panegyrist was true to her self-imposed task. But here something wholly unexpected intervened. Sydney happened to glance up towards the north.

“ Miss Ennerby,” said he, “ you’d better pull the hood of your ulster over your head : we shall be catching it presently.”

The world seemed to darken around them. Then came a few whirling flakes ; the wind rose and still rose ; presently the snow came driving on in blinding gusts and squalls, until they could see no further than a few yards from where they were standing. They did not attempt to move ; for it had sometimes been difficult to make out the road, on which there was not a single foot-track ; they merely stood with their backs to the hurricane from the north, knowing that it would not be of long duration. And then, gradually, the landscape

appeared to widen out; the heavens grew clearer; quite suddenly, through the still flying flakes, they beheld a far hill-slope shining a golden-white against the pale azure sky; and then again the horizon extended still further and further and further, until all the old familiar landmarks were visible—the rounded summit of Ben Loyal, the distant peaks and shoulders of Ben Hope and Ben Hee. The warm sunlight was abroad again; the air was sweet and keen; out there the wide waters of Loch Naver were shining a brilliant blue.

“I never knew that snow was black,” she said.

“Turner knew it,” said he. “Don’t you remember ‘Hannibal crossing the Alps?’ But when once the black snow-clouds have passed over, look how they change—look at them over there—where Ben Clebrig has got hold of them, and is twisting them about and mixing up sunlight with them—I wonder who except Turner would dare to paint *that*.”

“But you showed Miss Hague a beautiful snow-piece the other afternoon,” his companion said. “Wasn’t that painted here?—I thought I recognised the mountains.”

“Oh, yes,” he made answer; but he never

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would have any talk about his own work ; he immediately shifted the conversation by calling her attention to a heron that had just risen from the edge of the loch, his long legs still dangling in the air.

There was, however, one subject on which he was eager and anxious to approach Miss Ennerby ; though a certain fear of betraying himself bade him refrain. Miss Anne wore no engagement-ring : what conclusion might be drawn from that ? And at last, in a round-about way, he managed to get the information he desired.

“ I suppose,” said he, in an off-hand kind of fashion, “ that a girl so accomplished, and pretty, and amiable as Miss Hague is, must have had many admirers ? ”

“ Plenty,” said Miss Anne’s friend, with a bit of a laugh.

The answer was not to his liking ; but “ Bess ” continued, with a smile in her clear grey eyes—

“ There were two gentlemen on the steamer we came home in—they were friends, who had been away tiger-shooting in India, and they were coming home too—well, they both of them paid Miss Anne a good deal of attention ;

and at last it came to an open quarrel between them. I think it was something about sitting next her at dinner. At all events, they never spoke to each other after we left Port Said; and they parted at Plymouth without a word."

"Fools!" said he, abruptly.

"The second officer was about as bad as any of them," continued Miss Ennerby, complacently, and little thinking what deadly wounds she was dealing. "When he was on duty on the bridge, and when he saw her walking up and down the deck with anybody else, he used to glare at them until I wondered whether he wouldn't try to run us on to a rock somewhere and smash the vessel to bits. The night we had the concert and ball—coming along the Mediterranean—I had to get her to promise me that she wouldn't dance with any one—not with any one of them: I thought there would be pistol-shooting on deck next morning before we were out of our cabins. I'm sure it was none of her fault. She did nothing to encourage them. But a pretty woman on board ship always makes mischief among the men."

"Oh, of course," said he, rather breathlessly, "of course she was not responsible—no doubt

Miss Hague had some one else to think of—I suppose she is engaged——?”

“Oh, no, she is not,” said Miss Ennerby, who knew well enough what had prompted this question.

“Oh, she is not engaged?” he repeated, quickly.

And then it was that “Bess,” who was really a kind and sympathetic person, as well as a shrewd and sagacious young woman, and who had seen quite clearly how affairs were tending at the inn, proceeded to drop a few words of warning.

“No, she is not engaged; and she is not likely to be, until some great opportunity presents itself, that is, if her papa has his way. I suppose, Mr. Durham,” she continued, venturing to glance at the young man, “if you had much talk with Mr. Hague when he was here, I dare say you noticed what a fondness he has for people who are well known—who are talked about—distinguished in any way; and of course he has a father’s estimate of the value of his daughter; and I have no doubt he means Miss Anne, if she marries at all, to marry some very well-connected or prominent person. His other daughter married

the Chief Justice of the Arawayan Islands; and although that means banishment, with not much of a salary thrown in, still she's Lady Hendrick. I suppose you've heard Mr. Hague talk about Sir Thomas?" she asked, with a demure smile.

"Yes, I have; though I was not aware of the relationship," said he; but, alas! his mind was running on other things—he was thinking of the noble or distinguished person for whom Miss Anne was destined, and wondering what were her own views on that matter.

Presently his companion said—

"I think we ought to turn now, Mr. Durham; we must be a long way from the inn. Don't you find the glare of the sunlight on the snow very bewildering? Sometimes, if I look long at it, it seems to me quite pink; and then, if I shut my eyes, my eyelids are of the most brilliant grass green."

"Some of the shepherds about here are compelled to wear snow-spectacles," said he; but he was still thinking of the resplendent suitor who was coming along to carry off Miss Anne.

However, there was compensation for him, and a relief from these gloomy fancies, when he returned to the inn; for of course, when he

had to deliver up his charge, he went with her into the room where Miss Hague was reading; and Miss Hague was so good as to ask him to be seated, while "Bess" related her adventures of the morning. And then, as it chanced, there was a tap at the door; and here was Nelly bringing in the luncheon-things. This naturally was the signal for his departure; and yet it must have seemed hard to all three of them that he should be ordered out just after he had devoted the whole morning to taking Miss Hague's friend and companion for a long walk. As he rose to go, Miss Anne glanced quickly towards "Bess"—who was discreetly blind and oblivious—and then towards the young man himself.

"Mr. Durham," said she, without further hesitation, "won't you stay and have lunch with us?"

"If I may," he said; and then, before he knew where he was, Nelly had whipped along and brought back additional knives and plates and forks, and behold! here he was established at the head of this small table, the master of the feast, as it were. And when he had carved for his two companions, little, indeed, was the care he bestowed upon himself. He could eat

cold beef and pickles any day in the week when he was alone ; this occasion was far too precious to be wasted on food and drink. Even that resplendent and overbearing suitor who was coming to carry off this precious prize was for the moment forgotten. There were these three, a familiar and gay and friendly little party, cut off from all the rest of the universe by the snow, shut in by themselves, with no one to interfere with them, or put cold restraint upon their mutual confidences. And Miss Anne was so kind as to bewail his lone and solitary condition, which, she said, was far worse than her own, especially since "Bess" had arrived.

"Women are used to idle hours," said she, "and don't mind, if they have a book. But a man wants a definite occupation ; and it must be so hard on you not to find anything suitable for your work——"

"I am going to have a definite occupation anyway to-morrow," said he. "Whatever the weather is, I must try the loch for a salmon. You haven't had fish for dinner for three days."

"Who told you that ?"

"Nelly."

"Nelly mustn't reveal state secrets."

"I suppose she knows I am thankful to

hear the sound of a human voice up in this place," said he (which may or may not have been a hint). "Oh, but I'm not so very lonely now, I have secured a companion—a young collie—Gypsy, I call him—and as he is a strayed wanderer from somewhere or other, I have adopted him and taken possession of him. And Gyp is very grateful, I think. I have been watching and studying him ever since I came here; and anything more pathetic you can't imagine than the piteous efforts that dog made to get himself recognised as a legitimate dog. When a shepherd called at the inn and left his collies outside, Gyp would go up and make almost slavish appeals to be admitted of their company; and he generally won their friendship, for he is a kindly and affectionate beast; and then when the shepherd came out, away went Gyp at his heels, like the others, and very proud of the post. Of course, as soon as the shepherd discovered the interloper, there was a growl and the threat of a kick, and back came Gyp to the inn, downcast and sorrowful. Then again, when the mail-car was running, Gyp was all eagerness and business when it was setting out—pretending that he was part and parcel of the whole equipage—very excited

he used to get, running about in front of the horses, and greeting every passenger by a wag of his tail ; then, when the car left, away he would go after it, trotting busily through the snow, and looking up for a word of encouragement. He never got it, of course. He would go for half a mile or more ; and, if no one spoke to him, he would gradually lag behind, and at last turn and come away home in the deepest sadness. A clever dog, too," continued the young man, who was all for talking and none for eating on this joyous occasion. "I've often seen him gather the fowls in the farmyard together, just as a sheep-dog gathers sheep ; and when he had got them collected in a perfect circle—whether it was instinct or imitation, I don't know—he would look to the inn and wag his tail ; as plainly as possible he was saying, 'Now just see this—could any collie get sheep together better than that?—and yet you won't employ me for anything.' I'm afraid if Mrs. Murray had caught him, though, he would have had a stone or a peat shied at him—for, of course, he kept the fowls from feeding."

Now if Gyp was in anyway indebted to his master for having adopted him he amply repaid the obligation this afternoon, for he was the

means of getting Mr. Durham invited to five o'clock tea. Luncheon over, these three people chatted and chatted (it seemed so snug and comfortable for them to be together in this remote little place, isolated from the rest of the country by these great breadths of snow) until some chance suggestion was made that the piteously-petitioning collie should be produced. And then, when Gyp had been brought along to the parlour, and much be-petted, that also helped to pass the time; until here was Nelly with the tea-things! Of course Sydney was asked to stay; and of course he stayed; he could have wished it to snow for ever, and that the Arts Club might know him no more.

But larger events were to follow. When dusk and the bringing in of the lamps drove him (for very shame's sake) from this beloved apartment, what must "Bess" do but get up and say—

"Mr. Durham, do I understand from you that you occupy the public-room of the inn?"

"Yes," said he, "I do at present."

"Don't you think it would be more comfortable, seeing that we are wrecked on this desolate island, if we all dined together?" she asked. "Would you mind our invading your premises?"

Nelly and I could carry Miss Hague in—of course there's a sofa. Wouldn't it be more sensible?—if you didn't mind the intrusion."

Now this was distinctly wrong on the part of Miss Ennerby, if she was aware of Mr. Hague's intentions with regard to the future of his daughter, and if she perceived, as she must have perceived, how matters were tending between these two thus thrown together in this remote wilderness. But the young artist was very amiable and friendly; and besides, he was good-looking, which counts for something; and "Bess" was a sympathetic kind of creature. As for Sydney Durham, it is to be imagined that he did not treat this proposed intrusion with any kind of resentment. On the contrary, he busied himself in the short interval with all kinds of contrivances to make the so-called public room as bright and cheerful as might be for the reception of Miss Anne. He had a mighty fire built up, regardless of the cost of peats; he had two lamps brought in; he had a small, low table placed by the side of the sofa. Knowing the shyness of women-folk about ordering wine at an inn, he attended to that also—and he was safe at Inver-mudal. And then he awaited his guest.

No; it was most culpable of "Bess"—if she had any regard for the designs of Mr. Hague—to have made that suggestion; for the young folk found this initial evening so delightful that thereafter the three of them invariably dined together, to say nothing of the mid-day luncheons and the chess-playing in the afternoon. What had become of the artist's ambition?—what of the salmon-slayer's keen desire? Well, everything was put down to those wild snow-storms that were whirling over Sutherlandshire just at this time; and meanwhile the two young people were getting to know each other—and each other's history, and education, and opinions, and hopes—as intimately as it they had together come on a voyage round the Cape.

CHAPTER VII.

THE CAPTURE OF A KING.

THE wild weather continued. Sometimes, for days together, the whole outer world would be invisible by reason of this universal white smoke, save for a few spectral arms of trees—faint,

ghostly, unsubstantial things, half looming through the whirling maze of snow and sleet. The grouse that had paired in the previous month had packed again: occasionally, when the horizon widened out a little, a broad cloud of some two or three hundred of them could be seen whirring across the marshy swamp down by the Mudal. The red-deer had descended from the heights, driven by hunger to the shores of the loch. Once, by the aid of a glass, Miss Anne made out a hind and her calf that were quietly feeding, or trying to feed, within a dozen yards of the Betty-hill road. Sheep that had prematurely been sent up into the high regions had a sorrowful time of it; the twigs of the taller heather, protruding through the snow, was about all the grazing they could get. Spring it nominally was, but it looked more like midwinter.

Not that it mattered very much to the three English strangers at the inn. Miss Anne was perforce a prisoner, and the other two were quite content to keep her company. Even when a cessation of the snow and a bright morning took Sydney Durham away sketching or salmon-fishing during the day, he was always back for afternoon tea with these two

friends. Then he and Miss Anne played chess till dinner-time. Dinner they had together in the public room; and a very merry and vivacious little party they formed. Thereafter Miss Ennerby generally retired into a book, leaving the two others to a long, rambling chat by the peat fire. Of what did they not talk during these snug and pleasant evenings—having the experiences of two lives to compare? And what an interest each took in the other's adventures; and how anxious they were to find out each other's opinion on even the most trivial subject! It seemed as if these after-dinner hours were never long enough for their confessions and confidences. "Can it be so late as that?" was the usual exclamation when Miss Anne rose to take her leave.

But of course the end of this halcyon period was approaching. One evening, as they sate by the fire, like a youthful Darby and Joan ("Bess" was, as usual, plunged in her book), Miss Anne said to him, almost with a touch of sadness—

"It will be strange to look back on all this time. It seems to have been so interesting and pleasant and delightful, in spite of the rough weather. It is quite a new experience for me

—living in a distant little inn, and surrounded by nothing but moorlands and hills.”

“You mustn’t think it is always like this in the spring here,” said he, repeating a former warning. “The usual drawback of Sutherlandshire in the spring is the long-continued fine weather—that dries up all the rivers and lowers the lochs.”

“I am afraid I shall have to leave,” she said, “before I can see Sutherlandshire in beautiful weather.”

“You leaving?” he exclaimed. “Why? When? Surely you cannot be so foolish as to think of such a thing! There’s nothing you should give such an abundance of time to as a bad sprain, if you want a thorough recovery.”

“Mr. Durham,” she said, with a good-humoured smile, “you don’t think I have remained here all this while merely on account of a sprain? You see that I can get about a little; Dr. Douglas told me last week that I could go south at any time, provided I took a little care.”

“Why run any risk?” said he, warmly. “What is the advantage?”

“Well, I am not called upon to make the

experiment just at present," she continued. "The fact is, my father has still a fancy for trying the salmon-fishing, if only he could get those affairs in Lisbon satisfactorily settled. One day he writes telling me that I may look forward to leaving almost at once, the next he says I am to remain, just in case he may be able to come here for a fortnight. Of course he knows that Bess is with me; and that it is of no consequence how long I have to stay. I am sure *I* am in no hurry to leave; I have found being shut up in the snow-storm delightful; but it is all owing to you, Mr. Durham, and your kindness."

He paid no heed to the pretty compliment: his startled thoughts were far away.

"I hope, Miss Anne," said he, after a minute's silence, "that when I come to London you will let me call and see you sometimes."

She lowered her eyes quickly, and there was some embarrassment in her answer.

"We have no regular house in London," she said, evasively. "Before we came here we were staying for some time with my uncle, down near Bristol."

"Yes, but you must be coming to London occasionally," he responded, "especially if your

father is going to take a house there. And you will stay at an hotel, of course."

"Yes," she said, "that is how we have done hitherto. But papa was not quite satisfied with the last one; he talked of making a change. No doubt," she added, still with her eyes cast down, "you will see papa in London, and he will tell you where we are."

Long after Miss Anne had left that night Sydney sat before the fire, pondering over the curious reserve with which she had met his proposal that he should come and see her in London. Did she wish the familiar and intimate friendship that had been assiduously cultivated here in these wilds to revert to a mere distant acquaintance in the south? Nay, she must have known that he was cherishing other and far more daring hopes. Was this a hint to him that dreams that might be toyed with in these romantic solitudes must be excluded from the busy world to which they were both about to return? And then he recurred to Miss Ennerby's warnings as to Mr. Hague's idea of the future of his only unmarried daughter. Was Miss Anne cognisant of his plans?—did she give her assent to them?—was it only gentle consideration that caused

her now to intimate to him that henceforth he must find any acquaintanceship between him and her something to be settled and defined by her father?

He did not sleep much that night; and when the morning broke fair and blue-skied, with a new feeling of warmth in the air, that also seemed to confirm his fears. Here was the end of the snow-time approaching; and here the end of the happy days and weeks that he and she had spent together, isolated from all the rest of the world. After breakfast he went down to the loch. It was a clear, calm, voiceless day; the water so smooth that the broad reflections of the snow were broken only by the ripples caused by the boat and the oars—ripples that flashed a sudden blue across the shining white. But he was not thinking much of either painting or of fishing; he was thinking only of Miss Anne's going away, and of the abrupt conclusion of the simple little idyll of friendship—or more than friendship?—that had sung itself into existence in these still solitudes. How could he let her go without speaking—without hinting to her of the tender aspirations he had formed? At one time, indeed, he had been vain enough to fancy that

she herself might be looking forward to some such confession. At any rate, she could hardly rebuke him, or be offended by his untoward boldness; for surely it was nothing but the natural result of the marked encouragement (which might, alas! have only been prompted by kindness) that she had bestowed on him during all those happy hours and days.

At lunch-time he was still in the same perturbed frame of mind, notwithstanding that a beautiful, clean-run, silvery fish of fourteen pounds weight lay beside him on the snow. Was he to peril his chances by a premature avowal? Or, on the other hand, was he to let her slip away from him—to be lost in the crowd of London—to have their close companionship in the far north become a thing of memory only, and not a binding tie? Sometimes he thought he would confide in "Bess," and beg for her good offices of intermediation; and then again he would put that aside as a cowardly makeshift. The main thing before his eyes was that Mr. Hague, whose plan seemed to be of the most inchoate description, might at any moment suddenly summon Miss Anne away to the south; and this parting might be nothing more than a formal "Good-bye" at the door of

the inn, whatever longing, or regret, or wistful hopes might be in their hearts.

That afternoon, as Sydney presented himself in Miss Anne's apartment, he seemed unusually grave and preoccupied, while she, on the other hand, was particularly merry, for she had just given "Bess" a most merciless beating at draughts, and the defeated player was pretending to be very much annoyed. Of course, when the tea-things had been removed, and the chessmen put on the board, Miss Anne adopted a more serious demeanour, for chess is not a thing to be trifled with; and these two had found themselves so well matched that the contest was keen. Sydney now paid Miss Anne's skill the compliment of playing his very best; even that did not always avail him.

But on this particular occasion Miss Anne's skill was hardly called into requisition; her opponent manœuvred so badly. At the outset, or near the outset, he made a wrong guess as to her aim, and therefore got more and more confused, until it seemed that destruction was marching down upon him, from which he could only save himself by the sacrifice of his queen. At this moment Miss Ennerby came over from the window-table at which she was sitting.

"May I borrow your ink-bottle, Miss Anne?" she said.

"Yes, dear, you will find it in my dressing-case upstairs," was the reply; and therewith "Bess" left the room, quietly shutting the door behind her.

And at the same second a frantic thrill of anxiety shot through Sydney's heart: he was about to dare all: the opportunity might never return.

"Miss Anne," said he, rather breathlessly, "you spoke last night of going away, and I spoke of the possibility of seeing you in London; of course—you knew—I meant more than that——"

There was something in the tone of his voice that startled her: she looked up in surprise, then instantly lowered her eyes again; her fingers tightened themselves on the pawn she was about to move.

"Of course, I meant more than that, far more, though I daren't say it then. We have seen a great deal of each other here, and got to know each other very well; and I have been bold enough to look forward to something more than even your friendship, delightful as that has been. And I could not let you go away south

without saying a word to you—dear Anne, tell me that I haven't spoken too soon—tell me that you have already guessed——”

“Oh, Mr. Durham,” said she, looking up with troubled eyes, and the fingers that held the pawn were all trembling. “I—I did guess—and I was afraid—and I wish you had not spoken to me. Yes, I was afraid; I thought after I went away, after we were separated, it would be better—you would forget our being so long together and so much with each other. And I hope we shall always be friends—always—always.”

“Friends?” said he, almost in a tone of reproach. “And nothing more! Why?”

“I cannot tell you without—without confessing that I have been thinking of it,” said she, in great embarrassment, “and—and—before you spoke a word.”

“But I was sure you knew—I was sure you must know,” he said, eagerly. “What has that to do with it? No, dear Anne; tell me why I may not look forward to your becoming my wife—some day—no matter how far off? I don't care how long I wait for such a prize. Tell me what you fear may come in the way—is it your father?”

"I don't know what he would say," she said, rather sadly and hopelessly.

"Is that the only obstacle?" he asked, quickly.

She did not answer; her eyes were downcast.

"Dear," said he, in tones of earnest entreaty, "we may not have another chance of speaking together. All I want you to say is this, that if your father can be brought to agree, you will not say no. That is all the promise I want—will you give it to me?"

There was no word; her eyes were still downcast.

"Ah, you do not care to say it—will you give me your hand then?" he pleaded.

The trembling fingers released their hold of the pawn, and she was just about timidly to extend her small white hand across the board, when, with a warning cough, the good considerate dragon, "Bess," opened the door. Miss Anne caught hold of one of the pieces, and made a wild move—she knew not what. Sydney pretended to be studying the game; but he was far too excited and muddled to understand anything about it. Miss Ennerby came up to the table.

"How are you getting on?" said she, lightly.

"I thought there was danger threatening you, Mr. Durham. But, good gracious, what's that! Why, you haven't got a king! Where's your king gone to, Mr. Durham?"

Poor Miss Anne! Blushing furiously, she had to confess that she had inadvertently snatched away the king instead of the queen, and with nervous haste she proceeded to exchange the pieces; but as Miss Ennerby perceived that the now removed queen had been taken by a solitary pawn, that must have galloped right across the board for the purpose, the astute young lady went off to her letter-writing without a word.

Mr. Sydney Durham was in a particularly gay and cheerful humour all that evening; and he kept regarding Miss Anne in a very kind and affectionate way, though the young lady never by any accident met his glance. "Bess" was convinced in her own mind that something not unimportant had happened during the ten minutes in which she was assiduously searching for an ink-bottle that was staring her in the face; but she wisely concluded that it was not her business to speak until she was spoken to. She thought it highly probable she would learn quite enough before the night was out.

But as for Sydney, when the two young folks had retired and left him to his solitary reveries, the joy with which he had received Miss Anne's mute assurance of her regard for him, was succeeded by a good deal of anxious questioning as to why his dear Anne should fear her father's refusal. Was it the mere timidity of maidenhood? or had Miss Ennerby's talking about Mr. Hague's ambitious designs with regard to the future of his daughter been a sort of warning addressed to himself? It was clear that Mr. Hague had never heard of him or of his work, until the arrival of father and daughter at Inver-mudal; to the elderly gentleman this young artist was merely one of the light-hearted, light-pursed, amusing Bohemian fraternity, whose sketches he would look at some day with a view to the extension of a little friendly patronage. But to give his daughter to this unknown landscape-painter—what would Sir Thomas and Lady Hendrick say?

How sincerely that night did Sydney wish that the Royal Academicians had elected him an Associate! He had never talked slightly of the honour, as young painters are apt to do—until they receive it; on the other hand, he

had never coveted it much, except as a compliment paid by one's fellow-artists: but now, how he wished he could have put the magic letters "A.R.A.," before this ambitious papa as some kind of warranty of his position. How, otherwise, was Mr. Hague to be got to understand? Sydney could not very well sit down and write, "Dear Mr. Agnew, There's a man whose daughter I am anxious to marry who knows nothing about me and may want to know. Would you mind telling him what the public think of my work, and what price they are willing to pay for my landscapes? Yours sincerely, Sydney Durham." That could hardly be expected to form part of the transactions between Mr. Agnew and himself.

CHAPTER VIII.

FINALE.

HELP came to him from another and quite unexpected quarter. The very next morning, as it chanced, Miss Anne received a letter from her papa. She opened it with some trepidation,

she hardly knew why ; but ere she had finished reading it she was as rose-red as the maiden in the ballad when "Glenogie sate down." For this was what Mr. Hague had to say to his daughter :—

"MY DEAR ANNE,—I have at last got everything settled about those brats of Mr. Birrels, and hope to leave on Monday night next, or perhaps Tuesday, reaching you the following evening. Perhaps I have not missed so much, after all, if the weather has been so severe as you say ; and I am looking forward to getting a salmon or two as a reward for my trouble and worry on behalf of other people.

"Is Mr. Durham still at Inver-mudal ? I sincerely trust he is, for I wish to know more of him—I very much wish to know more of him. How I came to hear something of him in the south was the result of a very odd coincidence. You may remember that I could not accept the invitation of the Fishmongers' Company which arrived just as we were leaving Inver-mudal ? Very well, when I first came back from Lisbon I found I should be in London, after all, on that very evening ; and so I consulted our good friend Majoribanks, who eventually got me a renewal of the invita-

tion, and accordingly I went. You may judge of my satisfaction when I found myself placed next —, R.A.; and, of course, when the great man and I had talked a little while, I ventured to tell him of my project of forming a collection of contemporary art. Naturally that was to him an interesting subject, and I need not tell you all the hints he gave me; what I am coming to is that I chanced to ask him if he had ever heard of Mr. Durham. You should have seen his surprise—indeed, I was heartily ashamed of my own ignorance. ‘Heard of him?’ (indeed, — has rather a crushing way with him). ‘My good sir, Sydney Durham is one of the very first of living landscape-painters! Outside the Academy there’s nobody to compete with him; and inside the Academy he’ll be very soon.’ Then he asked me if I was lucky enough to have any of Mr. Durham’s work; and I had to confess that I had never even seen it, or thought of asking to be allowed to see it. And by-and-by, when I told him how I had met Mr. Durham in the Highlands, he said enough to convince me that we had rather mistaken the young man’s position—entirely mistaken it, in fact, for it seems he is quite a well-known figure in society, and has one of

the handsomest of houses that the artists all began building eight or ten years ago. Besides, he is of good family—a nephew of the Bishop of Wycheſter, I am told. I could ſee for myſelf when at Inver-mudal that Mr. Durham was a very good-humoured perſon, and I ſincerely truſt that he was not offended by my rather too familiar and *cavalier* treatment of him, which aroſe from ignorance of his true poſition. If he is ſtill there, I hope you will pay him every attention in your power, ſo as to make amends. With a little tact you could let him underſtand that we quite know who he is; and it would come better from you if you would convey to him that both of us hope that an acquaintanceship begun in that diſtant little inn may not be broken off when he returns to town. Did he not ſay ſomething about getting us tickets for the Private View? You muſt recall the ſubject, and ſay we ſhall be moſt pleaſed to go round the Academy with him; then I can aſk him to dinner, and in the buying of thoſe pictures I ſhall be entirely guided by his advice. It is juſt poſſible, of courſe, that, after I left, you ſaw but little of Mr. Durham; but ſince Miſs Ennerby joined you I hope you did not fail to reſume the

acquaintance, and that you have shown him every courtesy and consideration."

"Have I?" said Miss Anne to herself, with burning cheeks, and yet with a kind of frightened laugh. "Well, I think I have—perhaps more than papa will care to hear about."

And very quickly she took this letter to her friend and companion, Miss Ennerby, and asked her to read it; for if "Bess" had begun to suspect that Miss Anne was showing just a little too much favour to the young artist, was not this a kind of justification? Miss Ennerby read the letter through with a perfectly grave face. As she handed it back she would not take any notice of the tell-tale colour still lingering in the young lady's forehead. It was with perfectly demure eyes that she said—

"Your papa will be quite pleased that you and Mr. Durham have continued friends."

But "Bess" was a kindly and considerate creature; and that afternoon, as the two young folk were as usual at their chess, she was again called away. It was not an ink-bottle this time; it was a book.

"Dear me," she exclaimed, "I wonder where I can have left that 'Tinted Venus'—it must have been upstairs."

And upstairs she went.

"Do you know ——, Mr. Durham?" said Miss Anne, naming the famous Academician whom her father had had the good fortune to meet.

"Oh, yes, very well," he made answer.

"Papa met him the other evening; and he spoke a good deal about you," she continued.

"I hope he did not say anything against me," he remarked.

"Oh, no, quite the other way," said Miss Anne, pleasantly. "Very much the other way. I would read you what he said, but it might make you vain."

"Well, it would," he confessed, "for I value that man's opinion more than that of any other living painter—and that's the honest truth."

"Papa will be here next Tuesday or Wednesday," she said.

"Oh, indeed," said he, quickly looking up—for he wished to see how she herself regarded this intelligence; but her eyes were intently fixed on the chess-board, however much or little she saw of the game.

"And—and he hopes to find you here, Mr. Durham——"

"They generally call me Sydney," he ob-

served, just with a touch of reproach; "even mere acquaintances do."

"And—and he hopes that you and I have continued friends since he went away."

"Oh, I can assure him of that," the young man answered, with great cheerfulness: indeed something seemed to say to him that the tone of the letter received that morning was distinctly favourable to his hopes.

"And you are not to forget the engagement about the Private View," Miss Anne resumed, in humble obedience to instructions, "if you can get tickets. And he hopes you will come and dine with us, for he would like to have some advice from you about the buying of the pictures—we shall be at MacKellar's Hotel, in Dover Street."

He looked at her scrutinizingly, and yet in a kindly fashion.

"Do you know, dear Anne," said he, "I somehow fancy that since you got that letter this morning you have less fear of what your father will say—isn't that so?"

"I—I don't know—Sydney," she answered, with downcast eyes (and the mention of his Christian name was the result of a tremendous, almost despairing, effort).

“My dearest——” But here there was a loud step outside; and the door was opened by “Bess,” ostentatiously bearing in her hand Mr. Anstey’s little volume.

“It’s your move,” said Miss Anne, quickly, to her opponent.

“Oh, is it?” said he. “I don’t think so. I was waiting for you”—and therewith he boldly shoved a piece somewhere, but which or whither he probably could not have told.

Now we have been assured that “the course of true love never did run smooth;” but perhaps the young Lysander’s reading and experience were equally limited: at all events, in our own day instances have undoubtedly occurred; and here was one. It is to be admitted that when Mr. Hague arrived at Inver-mudal, and was at the very earliest opportunity of private confidence informed by his daughter of what had occurred in his absence, he was considerably taken aback; for his injunctions to Miss Anne to show every possible favour to the distinguished young artist had not at all contemplated this climax. But Mr. Hague was very fond of his daughter; and she made some pretty, and shy, and blushing excuses; and he came to the conclusion

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that, although he might have had other plans, and might have wished to be consulted earlier, the facts as they stood were not so very deplorable.

"You know, papa, Sydney wanted to speak to you first," Miss Anne continued, after her trembling confession,—and when the papa heard her call the young man "Sydney," he grew to think that not much time had been wasted while he was away in Portugal—"but I could not let a moment go by without telling you."

"Well, it is all very sudden, Anne," he said, "and I don't know that I should altogether approve; but, of course, as you say, you have had unusual opportunities of studying each other's character and disposition; and I must confess that everything I heard in London of Mr. Durham was to his credit."

"Dear papa," said Miss Anne, as she put her arms round his neck, and kissed him, and hid her blushing face in his breast. "You have made me so happy—and I was so afraid——"

"Besides," said he, disentangling himself from that embrace as a lover would hardly have done, "he has something to show for

himself; he has won a position; he has an established reputation. He might have been a very honourable and praiseworthy young man; but I confess, Anne, I should not have cared to see you marry a mere nobody. Among other things, —— told me that Mr. Durham's chief picture of last year had been bought by the Academy out of the Chantry Bequest, and I went down specially to South Kensington to see it. A most remarkable work—a most striking work, I call it. I could almost accuse Mr. Durham of having deceived us in not revealing his true position, but that modesty in a young man is to be commended—for its rarity, in fact——”

“Papa,” said Miss Anne, with a sudden doubt, “I hope he wasn't laughing at us for not knowing who he was?”

Mr. Hague looked rather uneasy at this suggestion; but directly he said—

“How could he, my dear? You must remember that you at least had heard of him as an artist: or you couldn't have asked him to give me counsel about the buying of pictures. Oh, no. But still, if we made a mistake in not wholly understanding his position, if we have offended his *amour propre*——”

“Oh, papa, Sydney is not like that!” Miss Anne exclaimed. “He is quite, quite different from that—he wouldn’t think of such a thing—he is too good-humoured—and—and a little bit sarcastic—he couldn’t be pretentious, if he tried—and you may be sure he never thought of being offended—please don’t ever mention that to him!”

Mr. Hague took the advice of his daughter, who probably comprehended the situation much more clearly than himself; but none the less did he show himself very amiably disposed towards the young man during the brief interview that shortly took place. Of course he did his duty as a parent; he uttered wise remarks about the danger of precipitancy; he dwelt on the necessity of young people getting to know each other very thoroughly before adventuring on so serious a step as matrimony; and so forth; in all of which Mr. Sydney Durham—who was half-bewildered by the unexpected turn that things had taken—heartily agreed with him. And then the old gentleman, having done his part, and shaken hands with his future son-in-law, went away to his own room to change and get ready for dinner.

When he came down he glanced at the table,

which had its ordinary cover on, and then he said—

“Ah, I suppose we dine in the other room, as we did before I left?”

“Yes, papa,” said Miss Anne, “we have done that all the way through, ever since Bess came up.”

“My dear!” said he, with astonished eyes. “My dear! Do you mean that Miss Ennerby and you have been dining every evening in Mr. Durham’s room?”

“Papa, it is the public room!” Miss Anne exclaimed at once. “It is the public room of the inn. I assure you it is quite, quite correct! Sydney told me so. The Duke’s agent came through here one morning by the mail, and he breakfasted in that room, so that proves it.”

Perhaps Mr. Hague was not entirely convinced; but the matter was past praying for now; and indeed this little confession enabled him to understand better how very intimately those young people had become acquainted in his absence. The little dinner-party in the public room—in the public room, be it understood—was now increased to four; and the conversation was about art. What two of the persons present were really thinking about may

have been a very different thing : indeed, there were little stolen glances which could have but little connection with this topic ; nevertheless, Mr. Hague continued to propound his views with regard to the pictures he intended to purchase. And he further intimated his intention of commissioning Sir John Millais to paint Miss Anne's portrait ; but whether this was to be a wedding-present from the papa-in-law elect he did not say, for Miss Ennerby was at the table, and was not supposed to know of the important events that had happened.

However, Miss Ennerby had not been quite blind to all that had been going on. This same evening Miss Anne summoned the faithful "Bess" to her room ; and thereupon the great secret was confided to her ; and many were the congratulations and happy wishes bestowed upon the young lady in return.

"But, you know, dear," said "Bess," with a renewed embrace, "that I had a pretty good idea. Do you remember the afternoon that I came downstairs while you were playing chess, and in passing I looked at the game to see how you were getting on ? I noticed something then. I noticed that you had just taken Mr. Durham's king with your pawn."

“Oh, Bess, that was the first time he—he spoke to me——”

“Yes, I thought there was something of that kind,” said “Bess,” “for you know, dear, you don’t ordinarily take your opponent’s king with a pawn—not *ordinarily*.”

THE END.

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